



AGATON SAX

AND THE DIAMOND THIEVES

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1

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

At three o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday 6th June 1959. Agaton Sax, Editor-in-Chief of the *Bykoping Post*, was sitting at his desk in the editorial office of that paper.

The sun was shining brightly over the peaceful little town and certainly no one could possibly guess that the most tremendous events were about to take place—events which would shake the town to its foundations, which included Police Sergeant Antonsson and many others.

Agaton Sax filled his Saturday pipe with great satisfaction, lit it, and blew one or two tricky smoke rings, which floated towards the flowery window curtains made by his Aunt Matilda.

The *Bykoping Post* is well known as a very excellent paper. The advertisement on the notice board in the Post Office is fully justified. It reads:

BYKOPING POST
FIRST WITH THE NEWS
SMALLEST PAPER
BUT BEST

No really important news item ever escaped the watchful eye of its Editor-in-Chief. He read all the telegrams that came in. Sometimes these would include items from Sergeant Antonsson, as for instance today. The following typewritten statement had been handed in to Agaton Sax by Sergeant Antonsson's twelve-year-old son at 11:15 -

The police in Bykoping (Antonsson) are searching for two men who smashed the large display window in Sofia Almgren's habadashery shop at nine o'clock last night and tried to steal several giant reels of cotton lying in the window. One of the men is taller than the other, the latter being rather under medium height; one runs faster than the other, who is fairer than the other. Both have straight noses, with a little wart on one of them.

Agaton Sax read this notice impatiently and threw it into the waste-paper basket. Then he went up on to the roof of his office, and started his *Hermes*. This fast helicopter, which was able to fly long distances at

a great speed, had been presented to him by the West European Police Association only last winter.

He rose straight up into the air from the flat roof of the house, circled over the little square for a few moments, swung round Frederick, the church weathercock, and then sank down towards the river. He lifted his bowler hat to ironmonger Nails, who was fishing in the river, rose straight up again to a height of about two hundred feet, and then steered westward towards the forest. There he halted for four minutes, gazing into the forest. Then he turned back, landed on his own roof again, and telephoned Police Sergeant Antonsson from his office. 'All is clear,' he said. 'You can fetch them.'

'Where? When? Who?'

'In the forest. Now. The thieves.'

'In the forest? Better a bird in the hand than two in the bush,' said Sergeant Antonsson, who liked talking in proverbs.

'Better two in the forest than no one in the lock-up,' answered Agaton Sax, a little crossly. 'Eighteen yards in among the trees, reckoned from the round stone. They are asleep. Both have warts on their noses.'

Three hours later the paper for the following Monday was ready for press and Agaton Sax sat contentedly puffing his Saturday pipe. All was quiet and peaceful.

Suddenly a shrill voice came from the wall behind him: 'It's 5:15, Agaton!'

Agaton Sax glanced at his bullet-proof wristwatch — a present from Scotland Yard; then he answered the wall: 'I'm coming. At once. In fact, I'm on my way!'

'You're a quarter of an hour late,' stated the wall.

'It's impossible to be punctual to the minute,' Agaton Sax pointed out.

'Not at all!' answered the wall sharply. 'I'm always exactly on time!'

Agaton Sax rose with a little sigh and went downstairs. In the big room below, two cups of coffee stood on the table, with his Aunt Matilda standing close to one of them.

'You cut off the speaking tube between two and three o'clock today,' she said reproachfully.

'Yes, Aunt. I had an important problem to solve.'

'I tried to speak to you six times, but you did not hear me!'

'No, Aunt. But I took the pills on time.'

'I've bought new pills for you. Hepaphossaminal-cardioncontrolinfermatolonmenomcnal. They are much smaller than the Cahumphosmorinstalaminhistophano-ralsalicylatenon.'

'Thank you, Aunt.' Agaton Sax drank his coffee slowly.

'But I did not want to remind you of the pills when you had turned

off the loudspeaker,' said Aunt Matilda. She poured herself out another cup of coffee.

'No?'

'No.'

'What was it then?'

'About this.'



'What is it?'

'An express letter, no doubt from some criminal or otlier,' said Aunt Matilda shrewdly, and gave Agaton Sax a letter with many foreign stamps. 'Perhaps it's poisoned,' shc added, wiping her hands on her apron for safety's sake.

'When did it come?'

'At 2:15. I don't like all these knavish tricks,' she went on, fixing her nephew with a stern eye.

'Knavish tricks?' he asked, looking at her sharply.

'Yes, this way you have of catching knaves and rascals all over the place. Surely they can't like it.'

'Who—the knaves?'

'No—the police. The fact that you run about as a detective can't amuse them very much.'

'No, Aunt, that's true. But neither would it be particularly amusing for them if I ran about being a knave myself,' Agaton Sax answcred with dignity. He rose. 'Thanks for the coffee. Goodbye.'

'The pills,' said Aunt Matilda, and pushed a little bottle over to him.

Agaton Sax quickly swallowed two.

'You'll feel much better now,' said Aunt Matilda.

'I always feel well, Aunt.'

'But only because you take the pills I get for you.'

Agaton Sax felt inclined to repeat that he always felt well and that he very seldom took any of the pills; but in the end he said nothing. He returned to his office upstairs.

With one decisive movement he opened the letter he had been given. It read as follows:

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

No doubt you have heard of my drawings. If not, however, you are not the only one. They are called *The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth*, and they represent absolutely true events and situations of the strangest kinds. Every drawing is accompanied by a short caption which explains the drawing—or contrariwise, the drawing may explain the caption, if the caption is still odder than the drawing. I attach a drawing with its caption so that you may judge for yourself.

As I detest all boasting, I will not tell you how excellent my drawings are, I will only state a few figures. I make 100 drawings per annum. In Europe they are published in about 100 papers. On an average each of these papers has 100,000 readers (about), children included.

As I have been drawing for five years the following figures emerge: $100 \times 100 \times 100,000 \times 5 = 5,000,000,000$ (= 5 milliards). You will see therefore, Mr Chief Editor, that 5 milliards of people, that is to say more than the whole population of the world, have read and admired my odd but true drawings. But for some reason or other, the 728 readers of the *Bykoping Post* have not yet had the chance of seeing them, Nothing is easier to remedy, From this week you can begin publishing them in your excellent paper. The *Bykoping Post* is the only paper in Sweden to which I intend offering this privilege. You will never regret taking it. Your 728 readers, like the other 5,000,000,000 readers, will rush eagerly to get the paper when it comes in the morning.

I shall arrive on the 7th June and would ask for the honour of an interview.

With highest esteem,

Yours faithfully, Stud Slogan.
Artist, inventor of *The Truth Drawings*.

Agaton Sax studied the specimen drawing, and then read the caption beneath it: 'The Emperor Ramanam-man XXXVII, who reigned from 1456-57, had such a long beard that he was obliged to braid it into two plaits, which he tied at the back of his neck.'

'This is really interesting,' murmured Agaton Sax. 'I shall certainly take these drawings, if the price is not too high.'

He leaned back in his chair. The room was warm and he closed his eyes. After about two and a half minutes he was enjoying a nap.

He was awakened by a fly examining his elegant moustache. He flicked it away and in doing so his glance fell on the large bookshelf that covered the whole of one wall. He had a wonderful collection of books about crime and criminals, as for example: *The Large Book of Crime*, *Our Most Ordinary Criminals*, and *Who's Who in the World of Crime*. His glance lingered on the last-named volume. He started. A sudden thought had struck him. That letter he had just read — did not

something in it remind him of something else? Something that had at one time captured his imagination? Agaton Sax had a phenomenal memory. He rose from his chair and went slowly towards the bookshelf.

He took down *Who's Who in the World of Crime*. He knew the book inside out. He turned over the pages of the criminals, arranged in alphabetical order: Rubin-Jones, Red Slim (see Green Slim), Sandy Plymagt, Sedel-Smith, Slocum, Sluckers, Sad Sam... Svensson... Swindelman...

He closed the book again. No Stud Slogan. Naturally not. The man's real name was, of course, not Slogan. If not, what was it? And was he a criminal? And, if he was, why had he come to Agaton Sax?

His mind was always amazingly keen. Now, as he used it, his whole body became tensed to the uttermost, his right forefinger slowly stroking his moustache. Then he realised that the book he needed was indeed *Who's Who in the World of Crime*, but an older edition — a much older edition than the one he was using. For the work had been published every year since 1880, the necessary alterations being made in each new edition.

Agaton Sax went again to the bookshelf and, in one confident movement, took down *Who's Who in the World of Crime 1891*. He remembered the name he was seeking: Bob Bubble. He looked it up, and he read as follows:

Bubble, Bob. Also called Snubble, Stubble, Cunning Bob, Bob Topp or Topp-Bob, born 1846. Began his criminal career in London as a newspaper seller. He kept back a large number of his papers from the days when sports results were published, and sold them later when all other papers were sold out at, of course, a much higher price. When that was no longer safe, he turned his attention to various other shady occupations. He was involved in the so-called great 'Parrot Swindle.' He bought a large number of greenish-yellow parrots, who, he claimed, could speak extra-ordinarily well, and coaxed about eighty credulous people to buy them. When he was brought to trial for fraud, he answered: 'It is certainly true that my parrots cannot speak. But they can think—isn't that even better?' After he had worked out his sentence, he took part in the so-called 'Penknife Swindle'. He sold penknives with an eighty-year guarantee, but they all broke within a few months. In 1888 he began work as a very clever artist, and sold to a number of papers his own drawings with captions, called *The Plain Truth*. He smuggled secret cipher messages into these captions for criminal gangs all over Europe. This activity was exposed in 1890. He was imprisoned but managed to escape, and at the time of writing he is at large.

Agaton Sax shut the book with its yellowing pages. On his round face was a look of genuine surprise, yes, even consternation. Never, during the many years during which he had fought crime all over the civilised world, had he been forced to take the offensive against a criminal of

one hundred and thirteen. What experience, what knowledge must not this aged man have collected during his long career!

2

THE SECRET MESSAGE

'The following day at 4:10pm Agaton Sax's super-intelligent dachschund, Tickie, began to growl. She was lying at her master's feet beneath his editorial desk.

Agaton Sax put down the magnifying glass with which he was studying some particularly interesting finger-prints sent to him by Scotland Yard. He straightened himself up and an expression of cunning momentarily invaded his round face. He swung his chair round and called out, 'Come in!'

The door opened slowly. A man with a short white beard, plus fours, long checked stockings, dark glasses, and a stick hanging over his arm, stood in the doorway.

'You're wonderfully well disguised,' thought Agaton Sax. 'No one would believe that you were a hundred and thirteen years old.' Aloud he said, 'Shut up, Tickie!' and turning to his visitor, 'You are Mr Slogan, I believe?'

'That's right. I'm Mr Slogan.'

'How do you do. A chair?'

'Thank you.'

Mr Slogan laid his stick on the table. Behind his dark



glasses Agaton Sax felt a searching, snake-like glance; he met it with a calm firmness. The short but tense silence was broken by a voice which said, 'We've finished the sausages.'

Mr Slogan jumped; then lifted his bushy eyebrows a trifle, as he said, 'You have a wall that speaks, sir?'

'Yes.'

'Extraordinarily interesting. I can make a drawing of that for *The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth*.'

A smile curled Agaton Sax's lip. 'So you want to sell your series to my paper? And what is your price?'

'A pound a drawing.'

'Very cheap,' thought Agaton Sax. Aloud he said, 'That is quite expensive. I must think it over. Have you any other drawings with you?'

'Of course.'

Stud Slogan handed him a drawing.

'The caption is already translated into Swedish,' he said. 'I have a staff that know all the European languages between them.'

'And when am I to expect another drawing?'

'When inspiration hits me.'

'And when will that be?'

'Tomorrow. Every day, in fact.'

'Excellent. You'll be staying in Bykoping for the night?'

After a moment's hesitation Slogan nodded and said he was staying at Algotsson's Rooms for Travellers.

'Good,' said Agaton Sax. 'I must speak to my directors before I decide.' (The directors were Agaton Sax and sometimes Aunt Matilda.)

'You shall have my answer tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock.'

Stud Slogan nodded. His searching, snake-like glance tried to ascertain whether the editor was playing a double game with him. As he could not discern any sign that this was so, he bowed politely to Agaton Sax, who opened the door for him, and watched his dangerous visitor go slowly down the stairs without holding on to the banister. Agaton Sax then stationed himself behind the curtain at the window and gazed down at the little market square. There he saw an old man of a hundred and thirteen approach the pump and, after looking carefully up at the house, begin to pump, and then swallow one or two deep draughts of water.

Agaton Sax went back to his writing table. He took up the drawing that he had just received, gazed at it for a moment, and then put it underneath his own specially designed microscope (a wonderful instrument which he himself had constructed when he solved the famous Saucer Case). He turned on its high-reflector 275 watt lamp, and the intense beam fell on Stud Slogan's drawing, producing an almost ghost-like clearness. With this microscope, Agaton Sax examined every square inch of the drawing, alert to the utmost.



'The drawing represented four pounds of sweets on a dish, with a

bejewelled hand stretched out towards them. On one of the sheets, Agaton Sax discerned some figures and letters, which he noted down carefully. Under the drawing was the following caption:

‘The incredibly rich Maharaja Ron-Him-Hok, who lived between 1632 and 1710, was inordinately fond of a certain type of sweet. These could only be bought in one particular town, Kr-Djuptgirscha, in another country, Hin-Drogdra, 1,000 miles from the Maharaja’s palace. 200 armed camel riders accompanied the wagon which carried the sweets all the way from there to the Maharaja. The journey took two months. As a result, the sweets cost 200 crowns apiece. In July 1710, however, the camel ate up all the sweets. When he heard this, the Maharaja was so angry that he died.

Agaton Sax thoughtfully examined this story, which, on the face of it, seemed so harmless. He stretched out his hand for his *Great Code Book*. In this thick volume were a large number of figures, tables, and other aids with which it became possible to read secret codes. Agaton Sax was well known as one of the world’s most skilful decoders, perhaps even the best. He shone especially when there was a question of very difficult codes in the Graelish or Brosnian language, or in other unusual tongues.

He laid a large sheet of white paper in front of him on the table, jotted down on it some thousands of numbers and letters all jumbled up together, calculated forwards, backwards, downwards, and upwards, compared them with the *Great Code Book*, calculated once more, and after a couple of hours’ work had written down the following line of letters on squared paper:

HINOSBTATOPOTNECETANETWSLEARKG-AORUFF

Within a few minutes he had rearranged these thirty-six letters, and wrote the words which they made:

POTATO SOUP CANNOT BE EATEN WITH LARGE FORKS.

He stared at the words; then abruptly he stood up.

‘Impossible!’ he shouted. ‘This code book is useless!’

With an angry gesture he threw the book on to the floor.

‘I must try my own system,’ he muttered, and sat down again at his writing desk. ‘I will try system 627 A-C.’

Soon he was again deep in signs, figures, and letters.

The hours passed. Aunt Matilda spoke from the wall but Agaton Sax heard nothing. Darkness fell over the town and all was silent and still, but Agaton Sax remained patiently at his task.

Just as the clock struck the twelve heavy strokes of midnight, he arrived at the following row of letters:

MILWOFNEHTROSYPSPUTELEPHTB

It was child's play for Agaton Sax to see that these apparently meaningless twenty-five letters simply meant:

OWLS IN THE BELFRY. STOP THEM UP.

He stroked his elegant moustache with his right forefinger. Was this the secret message? But if so, what did it mean?

'No,' he murmured, 'this cannot be right. I cannot do it with system 627 A-C. I must try with B system AC 73D.'

He extracted this system from his own cipher book, and at the same time took down his Monday pipe from the rack—for by now it was Monday morning. He began to blow enormous smoke rings. Again sheet after sheet of paper filled with his numbers. Hours passed. His round face showed no signs of fatigue. His wonderfully constructed brain worked at high pressure until 2:47 a.m.

Then he held up a sheet and read the following letters:

DODINTIGENTEWE MORNICKSNIHOHMADTROPER

In a couple of minutes he had rearranged these letters into a sentence:

KOH-MIH-NOR DIAMOND IN SWEDEN. GET IT. REPORT.

'Report? Where? To whom?' murmured Agaton Sax. But yes, he knew. He examined under the microscope the small numbers and letters he had noticed on the caramels in the drawing:

2 ST 7 ENTR

2 ESEALO

It was more than easy to see that these letters, 2st7entr2esealo, should be read as 227, Sloane Street.

'Report to London,' murmured Agaton Sax.

He rose slowly, and an expression of indescribable satisfaction stole over his features. The Koh-Mih-Nor diamond in Sweden! The dream of all diamond thieves! This exquisitely polished diamond, worth about six million pounds, which had been stolen ten years ago in India, and for which the police and detectives of all the world had hunted—this diamond which Agaton Sax had then been unable to trace owing to lack of time—this diamond was now within his reach.

He realised that he must be fighting a diabolically clever gang, with its headquarters in London. The gang would also have members in every other country in Europe, and one of these would be the hundred and thirteen year old Stud Slogan. In fact, he must be one of its most important members. Through his drawings with their secret cipher-

messages the gang's leaders in London could communicate with other gang members in London, Paris, Rome, Stockholm, and all the other capitals. The criminals in these places were often out on business trips and then it was difficult for the chief of the gang to reach them by letter or telegram. For this reason, obviously, secret messages in newspapers were used.

Now, apparently, the stolen diamond had been smuggled into Sweden, and the gang in London, informed of this, were sending orders to their men in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and elsewhere, through the drawings.

But as Agaton Sax stood there, immovable in the dawn, only one single thought, one single question filled his mind.

Why had Stud Slogan come to *him* with his drawings? Why had he taken the terrible risk of discovery by Agaton Sax, when there were so many other Swedish papers whose editors-in-chief were not detectives?

3

SERGEANT ANTONSSON TAKES A HAND

Agaton Sax slept for seven hours. When he woke he was still uncertain as to what he should do. Should he wait for Stud Slogan's next drawing, with its further message? Or should he fly to London immediately and tackle the gang at its headquarters? He decided to wait for the next drawing, Perhaps he would obtain new and decisive information through it.

He ate his lunch with Aunt Matilda. (On a Monday he was only allowed two eggs, two slices of bread, and a glass of orange juice.) Then he went for a walk with his dachschund, Tickie. When he returned, he sat down at his desk and waited for Stud Slogan's arrival to give him the answer to some of his questions. Meanwhile his whole mind was deeply occupied with the mystery of the vanished diamond.

He started when the telephone rang sharply. He took up the receiver. 'Hallo!'

'Agaton Sax?'

'Yes.'

'Antonsson here. I have news.'

'Something fresh?'

'Yes. I have caught a criminal.'

'Criminal? Who is it?'

'I don't know, but he seems immensely criminal. He looks as if he is disguised, but he isn't. That in itself I think very suspicious.'

'Doubtless,' said Agaton Sax dryly.

'He's an Englishman.'

'An Englishman?' Agaton Sax's voice took on a sharper tone immediately, 'Is he wearing glasses?'

'Yes. In his pocket.'

'A beard? Plus fours?'

'Yes, yes!'

Agaton Sax sat there as if turned to stone. Was it possible that Sergeant Antonsson had caught the notorious world-criminal, Stud Slogan? He controlled his temper and asked calmly, 'And why have you arrested him?'

'For dangerous driving.'

'Dangerous driving?'

'Yes. I was patrolling the main street when this man drove along it in his car. He was driving much too fast, so I signalled him to stop. He

obeyed, and I warned him. He did not seem to understand me, so I realised that he was a foreigner. Not wanting to upset him, I said jokingly "It is wisest to be a little careful in this town, young man".' ('Did you say "young man"?' cried Agaton Sax.) "'Why?' he asked. "Well," I answered, "because otherwise you may find yourself involved with Agaton Sax." "Agaton Sax—how is he connected with this town?" "Very closely," said I, "for he is editor-in-chief of our daily paper." He just stared at me. "Is he the editor-in-chief here?" he asked, and his face was grey. "Editor of the Bykoping Post?" "Yes," I said. "Editor of the Bykoping Post?" he shouted. His face went still more ashen and his beard turned quite white. "There are the offices," I answered, pointing to this building. "There?" he cried, his teeth chattering. Then his hair also turned white.'

'Go on!' said Agaton Sax, with grim satisfaction.

'Exactly!' I replied. But by that time he had stepped on the gas and was rushing away at sixty miles an hour. Naturally I concluded that he must be a very dangerous criminal, so I immediately chased him on my motor cycle and caught him up at the level-crossing.'

'Wonderful!' cried Agaton Sax. 'I will come at once.'

He quickly took his bowler hat from its peg and shouted to the wall, 'I am going to the police station.' Then he disappeared down the stairs, paying no heed to the repeated exhortations that poured from the wall.

He reached the police station a little out of breath and walked straight into the office. Sergeant Antonsson, very tall and thin, greeted his visitor with a friendly smile. 'I'm sure you will like my catch. The ugliest fish swim in the calmest waters, as they say.'

'Has he given you his name?'

'Yes, indeed—Stud Slogan, if you can call that a name. He is furious. He never stops talking and says that he is an honourable artist, that he will report me to the inter-national police, and so on. He has also asked me to engage a lawyer to defend him, but I have told him that we do not hold with lawyers in Bykoping.'

'Splendid! Now we must just get the next drawing out of him.'

'Drawing?' Sergeant Antonsson looked like a tall, thin question mark.

'Yes. I will explain to you in a moment,' said Agaton Sax. 'All very involved. But shall we go and look at him first of all?'

Antonsson nodded and picked up the key to the prisoner's cell.

Agaton Sax said, 'Allow me to congratulate you, Antonsson. You have caught the greatest criminal of both the present and last centuries, a particularly cunning member of a gang which has defied the European police for eighty-six years.'

Antonsson blushed deeply. He made a shy little gesture with the key and then put it into the lock of the cell door with quiet confidence.

'It's nothing, absolutely nothing,' he declared.

How right he was! There was nothing, absolutely nothing in the cell. It was empty; there was no Stud Slogan, or anybody else.

Both men rushed in.

‘But he was here just a minute ago!’ shouted Antonsson in bewilderment.

Agaton Sax looked at the grille in front of the window, or rather at the remains of the grille.

‘Very simple,’ he said. ‘An ordinary little file could saw through that rusty piece of iron in a few minutes. His car is also gone, I suppose.’

‘We must inform Scotland Yard,’ shouted Antonsson, who had gone very pale. ‘Think how angry they will be! What a misfortune!’

‘Keep calm,’ said Agaton Sax, who was thinking deeply. ‘There must be a way out.’

He walked up and down the cell once or twice; and then, lifting his right forefinger towards Antonsson, he said, ‘Now, listen. The most important thing just now is that Stud Slogan should not be caught.’

Antonsson started.

‘But you said yourself that he was one of Europe’s most dangerous criminals!’

‘Yes, that’s just it,’ said Agaton Sax firmly. ‘Stud Slogan must not suspect that he is suspected. He must be allowed to work in peace. He must do his drawings. His imagination must be allowed free scope; he must be encouraged to spread the products of his mind all over Europe. Are we agreed? Good. Then I fly to London immediately.’

Sergeant Antonsson was gazing spellbound at Agaton Sax, who had worked himself up into glowing eloquence. With a quick movement he now pressed Antonsson’s hand and then left at once for his home. Swift as an arrow he shot up the stairs to his office, pulled out his little suitcase, packed it in four minutes, and then shouted to the wall, ‘Aunt Matilda! Come up at once!’

‘Coming, Agaton.’

In everyday life Aunt Matilda governed with a firm hand, but as soon as great and important events began to happen—as soon as crime cast its fateful shadow over Bykoping, as soon as Scotland Yard called in despair for help, or Agaton Sax himself had discovered some immensely important clue—then it was Agaton who, with his superior power, took over the command from his Aunt Matilda.

Now he stood beside the table with the fingers of one hand stuck inside his jacket and thrumming the table with the fingers of the other.

‘Yes, Agaton?’ Aunt Matilda appeared in the doorway wearing her flowered apron.

‘I’m flying to London now, immediately. Note the following instructions carefully:

‘1. Stud Slogan’s series, *The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but*

the Truth, must be published in the paper. It might interest you to know, Aunt, that the captions contain secret messages which can be read with the help of my B system AC 73 D.

‘2. If Stud Slogan comes here tell him that I am exceedingly pleased with his series and that I shall be back on Friday. Tell him I have gone away on a little fishing holiday.

‘3. Don’t forget to give Tickie his mutton bone on Thursday.

‘Have you taken all that in, Aunt?’

‘Yes, Agaton.’

‘Splendid.’

‘Don’t forget your pills!’ shouted Aunt Matilda as Agaton Sax lifted his case with a powerful heave on to the ladder leading to the roof.

‘No. Goodbye, Aunt!’ Agaton Sax shouted back, and disappeared up the ladder.

A few minutes later he was standing on the roof. His helicopter’s powerful engine had begun to throb and, lifting his bowler hat to Aunt Matilda, and Tickie, who were now standing in the yard looking up, Agaton Sax rose vertically to a height of 1,350 feet, and from there immediately took off on a south-westerly course towards London.



AGATON VISITS THE GANG'S HEADQUARTERS

The distance from Bykoping to London is some nine hundred miles as the crow flies, and at the rate of a hundred miles an hour the journey took Agaton—if you work it out carefully—some nine hours. When he flew in over London Airport, he radioed the following message to the Ground Staff:

‘Hallo, hallo. This is Agaton Sax in his fast helicopter, *Hermes*, XP 677. According to my agreement with Scotland Yard and the head of the Passport Control, I am not obliged to produce a passport.’

The telephonist on the ground sent him the following rude radio reply:

‘If you are Agaton Sax, I am old man Noah. Come down immediately and show the number plate on your miserable flying chair—otherwise we'll bring you down with a landing-net.’

Agaton Sax went white with anger and answered:

‘I realise that you are either old man Noah or one of the two asses in his ark. I suggest that you do not deal with things that lie outside your narrow scope. Good evening!'

To this Agaton Sax received the following reply:

‘Chief radio telephonist speaking. I much regret that my subordinate was not able to distinguish between himself and old man Noah or between Agaton Sax and an impostor. The mistake will not be repeated. Welcome to London. Your allotted height is three hundred and eighteen feet.’

‘Many thanks,’ replied Agaton Sax. ‘Kindly ask Hotel Posh to clear their roof for my landing.’

An hour later he had landed, had a bath, written a picture postcard to Aunt Matilda, and planned his campaign for the following day.

He rose at 7 am and went to work with his usual energy, which never forsook him. From the roof of the hotel he was able to see 227, Sloane Street quite clearly through his bullet-proof telescope. It was a very new eight-storied building. Agaton Sax rubbed his chin thoughtfully. How was he to find out in the quickest and surest way which of the flats was occupied by the gang?

He lit his Tuesday pipe and puffed strongly, and as the smoke rose in great clouds towards the London sky his thoughts cleared. In actual fact, the thing was quite simple. He dived immediately down into the inside of his *Hermes* and confirmed that all the tools he would need

were there.

Then he painted a large poster, which he hung on the side of the helicopter. It read: **WALL INSPECTION COMPANY LIMITED**. Then he dressed himself in an inspector's uniform and hid his face beneath a gas mask so that no one should recognise him. Finally he started the helicopter.

As he approached the large building, he steered his *Hermes* just above the first row of windows. Then he let his machine sink slowly down towards the ground, rose to the next row of windows, and so on. He repeated these up-and-down tactics in front of the windows facing the well round which the building was constructed. He behaved very correctly throughout, bowing politely to all the tenants (who gazed at him through their windows either in surprise or anger) and jotting down notes (obviously for use of the Company) with the greatest industry.

What no one realised or understood was that Agaton Sax was filming all that he saw through those twenty-five windows, using a miniature film camera that he himself had devised.

Within a couple of hours he was back in his hotel room with a developed film. Full of excitement, he fixed up his roll of film, lit the lamps, and set the projector apparatus working.

Agaton Sax had only one thing in view as far as this filming was concerned; he did *not* want to see what the people in the various offices or flats were doing, he only wanted to see what they looked like. It was not difficult to exclude immediately certain persons whose appearance was in no way criminal.



So for example in Flat 6, or in Flat 2, or in the fourth window to the left facing the wall.

Others were more doubtful. For example, in the third office flat to the right,



or in the top flat to the left.



But when Agaton Sax got to the window of Flat 5 facing the wall, he did not hesitate for a single moment. This must be the headquarters of the diamond gang!

He gazed at this arresting picture for a long time, fixing his attention particularly on one of the men. Then he nodded thoughtfully. 'Octopus Scott, without any possible doubt,' he murmured. 'One of the most dangerous rogues in the world today, perhaps even the most dangerous. What a pleasure it will be to catch him!'

By now it was evening. He took a taxi to 227 Sloane Street, but he found the gang's flat now in darkness. He decided to wait till next day for his great attack.

But within a very short time an ingenious idea had occurred to him. He rang up Inspector Lispington at Scotland Yard. As soon as he had finished explaining his needs, Lispington answered, 'Of course, Mr Sax. We will immediately get hold of experts in boring through walls, increasing the volume of sound, etc; after all we have the whole night before us. Always at your service. For six years we have hunted Octopus Scott, that dim, baffling figure, and have not even seen his shadow; but his mere name produces alarm not only in Scotland Yard, but also in the International Police Force.'

Naturally Inspector Lispington would have liked to have been present himself when Agaton Sax began the struggle against the gang. But he knew that the Swedish editor preferred to work alone, and this preference had to be respected; Scotland Yard might have been shaken to its very foundations by the Swede's fury.

Anyone watching No.227 Sloane Street during the silent hours of the night would have seen one expert after another slipping in and out of the large building—each carrying large or small bags of tools, projectors, measuring instruments, condensation registers, synchronisers, apparatus for recording and for playing back, listening in, filming, developing, enlarging, increasing volume, and so on. They all headed for the room adjoining the gang's flat.

In that room stood Agaton Sax, personally directing the work. (The

tenants had been asked by Scotland Yard to move out for a day or two.) The work was done quickly, quietly, and extremely efficiently. The various pieces of apparatus, instruments, and machinery were arranged tidily in a pretty pattern on the floor, where they were finally adjusted, polished, loaded, and tested. A minutely small hole was bored in the wall between the two flats and into this hole was fixed a special film—or rather a TV—camera invented by Agaton Sax himself. This would record all that happened in the room, and throw a picture of it on to a large white screen.

Agaton Sax rubbed his hands. The time was now 4 a.m. and he thanked the experts for their work and bade them goodbye. He slept for a few hours. At 9 a.m. he heard the key turn in the door of the gang's room. He saw the door open and a man enter. There could be no doubt; he was Octopus Scott.

Octopus Scott was his name and Octopus his nature. It might truthfully be said that Scott seemed to have as many arms (eight) as that peculiarly dangerous animal itself. No property, either real estate or personal possessions, was safe from this malefactor, whose tentacle-like grasp reached everywhere. As far as Agaton Sax's information went, Octopus Scott must be many times a millionaire, for he had carried out some of the most daring and lucrative robberies of gold and jewels in criminal history. His strong jaw, the energetic growth of his black moustache, the long muscular arms—all witnessed to his being a ruthless criminal who found no task too difficult.

Octopus Scott turned the black cigar at the corner of his mouth, and went to the safe, which he opened; Agaton Sax carefully noted the combination used. The criminal then took some twenty thousand pounds out of the safe, pushed them into the back pocket of his trousers, and then went to the window, which he opened. He glanced upwards, downwards, and to the sides, shut the window, and went and sat down at the table.

He blew out heavy clouds of cigar smoke and beat his fingers impatiently on the table, Agaton Sax watching him carefully all the time. What a dangerous adversary! He saw in Scott's slightly bloodshot eyes a cunning not usually found combined with such great ruthlessness, as it was here. He reminded himself of all the coups that this arch-criminal had carried out, putting the fear of God into Scotland Yard and other police organisations. For instance, the smuggling of enormous quantities of gold underneath the English Channel two years ago, or the robbery of the whole of Merzegovina's State Debt just after it had been paid into the Merzegovina State Bank.

And yet—this very Octopus Scott, this leader of the criminal world, would never in his wildest imaginings have been able to foresee that one of the most dangerous opponents of crime, in fact quite the most

dangerous in the present state of the globe, was sitting in the next room calmly smoking his Wednesday pipe, and watching all his criminal proceedings!

5 ROGUES MEETING

The door opened again. Octopus Scott blew a gigantic smoke ring.

‘You are ten minutes late, gentlemen,’ he said in a very disagreeable voice. ‘It will be deducted from your wages—as usual!’

The two newcomers stepped quickly forward to the table, both pouring out excuses. Octopus Scott studied them through half-closed lids. Then he banged the table with his revolver, as a sign that the meeting had begun, and said, ‘Reports! You begin, Charlie.’

Charlie was a small, almost round man, with a frightened expression. He cleared his throat and began:

‘The drawing has been published in the usual European papers. Here is the caption: The KOH-MIH-NOR DIAMOND IN SWEDEN. GET IT. REPORT.’

‘Good,’ said Octopus Scott. ‘And what is the caption of today’s picture?’

Charlie cleared his throat again.

‘Well?’

Slowly Charlie drew an English morning paper from his pocket. He pushed it over to Scott.

‘What’s all this about?’ asked Scott.

‘The drawing ... It is not ... is not published.’

‘Slogan does not seem to have sent a drawing for today’s edition,’ said Sandy, a thin, freckled man about thirty-six years old.

‘Not sent one?’ roared Octopus Scott. ‘What does this mean? Why, he has been doing drawings five times a week for five years—and has never failed! What was the caption to have been this time?’

‘CONTINUE SEARCH FOR DIAMOND IN SWEDEN. PROBABLY IN STOCKHOLM’S OLD QUARTER.’

‘When was Slogan given instructions about today’s message?’

Charlie wriggled. ‘I telephoned him yesterday.’

‘Well?’

‘I could not get hold of him. He did not answer. I was ringing all day. Thirty-eight times in all.’

‘Where?’

‘To a small place called Bykoping. He had given me a telephone number there.’

'What the devil was he doing in a hole like that?'

'Nobody knows. Perhaps he has had sunstroke.'

'Up there, close to the North Pole? Brainless idiot!' Octopus Scott smoked his cigar violently. 'Have we no reports from our agents in Stockholm and neighbourhood?'

'No.'

Octopus Scott whirled round on his office stool. The two men trembled, for this sudden whirling round was a sure sign of their chief's fury.

'Is there anyone who has a grain of sense in this set-up?' demanded Octopus Scott. 'Who is going to get hold of the diamond? Holy Joe and his gang, or us? I'm only asking!'

At that moment there was a ring at the door and a telegraph boy came in. Octopus Scott tore open his telegram.

'Well, there are at least some who are not quite crazy!' he cried. 'Listen to this: "Have read message in *Bykoping Post*. Have traced diamond. Will communicate again shortly. Jim and Slim." That's the stuff! Charlie, let me see the Swedish paper for yesterday.'

Charlie disappeared. A tense silence followed his departure. The only sound to be heard was Octopus Scott's slow chewing at his cigar, Sandy, the other confederate, sat absolutely still. He tried twiddling his thumbs to make the time pass, but after only a moment Octopus Scott gave him such a furious glance that he stopped at once and stuck them into his waistcoat pockets instead.

Half an hour later Charlie came back, and now, to his great delight, Agaton Sax saw a copy of his own paper laid on the table in front of Octopus Scott.

'What is this?' jeered Scott. 'Is this a newspaper? It looks to me more like a leaflet advertising a cattle sale. Where is the drawing? Ah, here!'

He devoted his attention to the drawing; then he folded up the paper and went on chewing his cigar. Suddenly his slightly bloodshot eyes went stiff and cold as he stared at the front page of the *Bykoping Post*. He stopped turning his cigar and uttered a yelp.

The other two men half rose in their seats with agonised expressions on their faces. Octopus Scott pointed to the name printed beneath the newspaper's title: EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, OWNER AND PRODUCER: AGATON SAX HIMSELF.

'Agaton Sax!' cried Charlie and an icy silence followed. Agaton Sax followed every moment of this dramatic crisis with the deepest pride.

'Agaton Sax!' Sandy then burst out. 'Help! Help!'

'We are lost!' shouted Charlie.

'Silence!' shrieked Octopus Scott, thumping the table with his fist. 'We must think, think—THINK, I say!'

Pale, with their teeth chattering, the two men began to think while

the third, that is to say Octopus Scott himself, walked back and forth on the floor, sending out great clouds of cigar-smoke. Suddenly he stopped and said, 'Now you can shut off your two rusty brain mechanisms again. I can't bear to hear them creaking and jarring. This is how the matter stands. When I obtained news that the Koh-Mih-Nor diamond was in Sweden, or whatever the measly little country is called, I gave Stud Slogan orders to begin to publish his drawings in a Swedish paper, so that we could send messages quickly to our friends, Jim and Slim, in Stockholm, or whatever the capital is called. The Stud Slogan drawings are published only in *small* papers in every country, of course, as then they arouse less attention, as it were. Stud Slogan evidently thought that it was simplest to choose the very smallest paper in Sweden, and it so happens that that paper is owned by Agaton Sax.'



'We are lost,' groaned Charlie. 'All hope is gone,' he added, and sank back in his chair.

'Silence! What happened next? Well, Stud Slogan got in his first drawing, the one we have seen; and then what happened? Try and think for yourselves, at least for a second or two... Well, *he discovered suddenly that he had landed in Agaton Sax's paper*, and grew so frightened that he rushed away. That was why you, Charlie, got no answer when you telephoned thirty-eight times. He's gone—he's disappeared. Therefore we can't give Jim and Slim any more orders through Stud Slogan's drawings, for we shan't be able to find Stud Slogan; and we shan't be able to get hold of Jim and Slim either. What shall we do? THINK, I say!'

Scott resumed his agitated walk once more, while the clouds of cigar smoke grew thicker and thicker around him. Charlie had unbuttoned his collar and was fanning himself feebly with a forged hundred-pound note. Now and again he gave a little groan. He started and almost fell off his chair when Octopus Scott suddenly stopped his walk, banged his forehead, and uttered a loud neighing laugh.

'Ha! Why should we be anxious? Stud Slogan has only dropped one of his usual bricks. The forty-third in less than a year. After all, we don't need his damned drawings. We can get on without them. As for Agaton Sax—can anyone imagine for one moment that he has seen through the

drawings and their messages? How could he? And even if he had—can you imagine that I, Octopus Scott, could be afraid of that miserable little squirt? Never!’

He blew a tremendous cloud of smoke towards the ceiling and twirled his cigar between his lips.

Agaton Sax was outwardly entirely calm while he listened to these insulting words, but a careful observer would have seen an expression of deep anger and bottomless scorn beneath his carefully shaped moustache. Slowly he began to drum his fingers on the arm of his chair. How long must he put up with this? Had not the time come for him to act against these insufferable braggarts? But he did not move. The moment, he decided, had *not* come.

Octopus Scott sat down at the end of the table. He had finished thinking. He blew smoke rings at his two colleagues as he said, ‘Your timid brains cannot, of course, work out any sort of a plan. I realise that. To me, however, the whole thing is clear. We will immediately fly to Sweden, or whatever that funny little country is called!’

Charlie rose, trembling. ‘But Agaton Sax... He is in Sweden too... We can't...’

At this moment Agaton Sax saw what none of the others had seen, that the door to their room was being opened very, very slowly and carefully from the outside. Agaton Sax stared at the door, fascinated, and saw a shining revolver pointing at the three men seated round the table. Then yet another revolver appeared—aimed slowly but implacably at Octopus Scott himself. Scott had not, as yet, noticed anything amiss.

Agaton Sax had risen from his chair and stood with his eyes riveted on this dramatic sight. For a second something happened to him which had never happened before; he felt so confused that he did not know what to do, he could only hold his breath.

And yet even in this breathless second, he could not know what further and tremendous surprise awaited him round the corner of that door.

Octopus Scott thumped the table with his fist and shouted, ‘Agaton Sax? Are you afraid of that little whipper-snapper? I'll punch his nose as soon as I get hold of him.’

Just at that moment the door opened wide and Octopus Scott and his confederates stared into the mouths of two revolvers, while at the same time they heard a voice saying, ‘Really, Mr Octopus P Scott, you intend to punch Agaton Sax's nose, do you? Well, here you are then, Mr Octopus P Scott. Punch it, for here is Agaton Sax—standing in front of you.’

6

A DOUBLE GAME

Agaton Sax emitted a cry of surprise when he saw all this on his television screen. Of the many strange events in which he had taken part over the years this was certainly the strangest.

How was it possible that he, Agaton Sax, while watching on his television screen all that was happening in the room next door, should suddenly see himself, Agaton Sax, enter that same room? For it could not be denied that it was Agaton Sax to the life who was standing there, pointing two guns at the three gangsters round the table.

'If I didn't know that I was sitting here, I should believe that I was standing in there—or else that I was dreaming in here that I was standing in there—or am I there dreaming that I am sitting here? Or...' all these thoughts rushed through Agaton Sax's astute little brain with lightning speed—so quickly that it only took him a second to conclude that the man who had just entered the next door room was not Agaton Sax at all but an unusually clever impostor. Thereafter he followed with breathless attention the scene being played out in the next room.

'The impostor—for that is what we will call the stranger—had kicked the door to behind him. He took up a relaxed position, with his bowler hat pushed a little to the back of his head. He was correctly and elegantly dressed even to a silk handkerchief in his breast pocket—exactly like the real Agaton Sax; and not content with this appearance, he spoke the extremely difficult Brosnian language, just like the real Agaton Sax. What he now said was in perfect Brosnian:

'Tjep Oct-kantarossal tarasta hep-opus latjannaros-sara hej !' (Which means: 'Glad to meet you, Octopus!')

'It's him, I recognise him from the police pages in the papers,' stammered Charlie in a half-suffocated voice. 'I told you so. We are lost!'

'The three men crept close together. All their faces were ashen grey and they were trembling in every limb. In vain Octopus Scott tried to maintain a dignified appearance, even while glancing longingly at his revolver, which still lay on the table. The impostor lightly waved his left-hand revolver and said in superior tones:

'Don't forget, Mr Octopus P Scott, that I shoot as well with my left as with my right hand. I have won the left hand gold medal in various world championships.'

'What are you doing here?' asked Scott with an attempt at icy

hauteur.

‘Just checking all your money to see that your notes are true-currency,’ answered the impostor.

* genuine, not counterfeit

‘Money? As if I had any money?’

‘All the better! If the money in the safe is not yours, you can have no objection to handing it over to me,’ said the impostor with a most charming smile. ‘But please be quick about it. I am in a hurry.’

Groaning, Octopus Scott went over to the safe, where he tried in vain to hide several thousands of pound notes from the impostor’s watchful gaze. But at only a glance, the unwelcome visitor deftly sorted out the bundles of good notes from the dud ones. Then he pushed the forged ones across the table to Octopus Scott, shovelling the others into his own pockets.

Into Octopus Scott’s bloodshot eyes came something very human—reminding the onlooker in a strange way of tears—as he saw one bundle of notes after another glide down into the impostor’s deep pockets. The sight was almost unbearable to him. His mind reeled and his heart almost stopped beating when he saw the last of the good notes disappear out of sight.

‘Well, there you are,’ said the impostor, patting his pockets lightly. ‘So now there only remains your note-case and your own pockets—your back pocket has rather a suspicious bulge, Mr Scott. I shall be much obliged if you will show me its contents Yes, thank you very much. It appears to be only a negligible little sum of fifty thousand pounds.’

The impostor threw a quick glance round the room, bowed, and said, ‘Thank you for your kind attention, gentlemen. You need not fear Scotland Yard; I will not tell them that I have traced you, but I advise you seriously to follow an honourable course in future, as I shall keep careful track of your activities and take from you every penny you earn in dishonest ways. And there is one thing more: don’t try to follow me; and, above all, don’t shoot when I lock the door from the outside. It would only attract inconvenient attention. *Tram karrossantonnaran-Octlantaran opus.*’ (Which means: ‘See you again soon, Octopus!’)

The next moment he had glided out backwards through the door like an eel and locked it from the outside.

Agaton Sax stood there for a moment completely baffled. Should he follow the impostor? He realised that if Octopus Scott was the world’s most dangerous criminal, then this unknown stranger must be at least twice as dangerous, since he was daring to sail under his own, Agaton Sax’s, flag. In one bound he reached the door, pulled it open, and just caught a glimpse of his double as a dark suit disappeared round the corner of the corridor.

The situation was of course critical. At any moment Octopus Scott

and his friends might come out of their flat and then: (1) Agaton Sax must not be found in the corridor; (2) he must have locked the door of his own room, so that the criminals could not rush in and discover all his activities.

In a flash he had locked his door from the outside and ran after his double, who was now entering the lift. Agaton Sax did not attempt to take the lift; instead, he tore down the stairs at breath-taking speed. The impostor had, however, too good a start, for when Agaton Sax reached the bottom, the other had disappeared.

Agaton Sax bit his underlip. This was immensely vexing—yes, even dangerous. "What could not this impostor do? Deep in thought, Agaton Sax walked slowly back into the lift and ascended five floors, went into his room and confirmed on his television screen that the gang had left their office, probably to begin the hunt for their tormentor. At the same moment he heard agitated voices from the corridor. He opened his door slightly. Two of the gang were standing by the lift and the two lift-men were gesticulating in a very animated manner.

'Did he go up or down?' Octopus Scott was shouting at them.

'Up!' said one of the lift-men.

'Down!' said the other.

'When did he go up or down?'

'A minute ago. He went down in my lift and disappeared into the street. It was only a minute ago.'

'Wrong! He came in from the street and came up in my lift just a minute ago.'

'Well where did he go then?' asked Octopus Scott, and threw away his cigar with a furious gesture.

'He went to the left here in the corridor.'

'On the contrary! He came from the left here in the corridor.'

A messenger boy now took part in the conversation. He had listened carefully to the description of Agaton Sax's double and now he explained, 'He didn't go down in the lift; he ran down all the stairs—I saw him myself. And ten minutes ago he came back and crept up the stairs.'

'Quite right!' cried one of the lift-men, 'I saw him running down the stairs.'

'Oh, did you—well, I'm blowed!' cried the other one. 'I took him down myself in my lift. No one could mistake the man.'

'Blind Idiots, both of you!' shouted Octopus Scott and trampled furiously on his straw hat, which was thereby transformed into a little shapeless heap of stubble. Then he tore into his office again.

Agaton Sax backed quickly into his room and sat down at ease in his armchair. Octopus Scott ran round and round the next door room, lifted his hands towards the ceiling, swore violently, dived headlong into the

safe, roared, and then rushed to the window as if he meant to jump out. Then ran round and round the room again.

This sad spectacle went on for two hours, and Agaton Sax began to get hungry. Then the door of Scott's office opened and his two confederates appeared.

'Well?' shouted Octopus Scott. 'Have you found him?'

They shook their heads and a terrifying silence ensued. Anything might happen.

'We shall perhaps find him tomorrow, if we're patient,' said Charlie with a feeble attempt at a smile.

Octopus Scott glared at him, almost suffocated by rage. He was distracted by a knock on the door; a telegraph boy came in.

With trembling hands Octopus opened the telegram, then his face lighted up as with an inner joy and he cried, 'We are saved! Listen! "Shall get diamond tomorrow. Awaiting further orders through *Bykoping Post*. Jim and Slim." Good! Marvellous! We are six millions richer!'

Charlie lifted one hand feebly and slowly. 'But... But we...'

'But we what?' roared Octopus Scott, whose face had darkened at this unfortunate interruption.

'We... How... But... How shall we give the order to Jim and Slim if we cannot get hold of Stud Slogan? He is making no more drawings and we cannot telephone or telegraph to Jim and Slim, for we don't know where they are. The drawings in the *Bykoping Post* were our only hope, and there are no more of them. We are lost.'



The terrible truth now penetrated Octopus Scott's brain. He became a thundercloud and Charlie and Sandy collapsed under the dreadful thunderbolts and lightning loosed by his words.

When the worst of the storm was over, Octopus Scott declared, 'There is only one thing to be done. We must fly to Sweden, or whatever the country is called, and take the matter into our own hands. Take the diamond into our own hands. Ha, ha, ha!'

His laughter was metallic, almost hollow.

'But we have no—we have no money!' Charlie dared to say.

'Get some, and get a plane too! Steal one, build one, do what you

like, but we fly tomorrow afternoon at the latest! Here is twelve and sixpence. Buy that excellent book *Make Yourself an Aeroplane*. We meet here tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. This meeting is at an end for today.'

SCOTLAND YARD TAKES A HAND

That same evening at 9:30, Inspector Arthur H Lispington sat in Scotland Yard, deep in the study of some particularly interesting footprints made by a gang operating in south-west London. His clean-cut features showed traces of fatigue after a long day of concentrated reasoning, as a result of following clues.

Suddenly the telephone on his desk rang and he picked up the receiver.

‘Hello.’

‘Inspector Lispington?’

‘Speaking.’

‘Good evening, Inspector. This is Agaton Sax.’

‘Good evening! I was waiting to hear from you. How are you getting on?’

‘Excellently, and entirely according to plan.’

‘Do you think we shall be able to haul them in?’

‘Of course.’

‘Splendid. When?’

‘I would suggest tomorrow morning. Nine o'clock, 227 Sloane Street, fifth floor.’



‘Splendid, Mr Sax; and who are they?’

‘Charlie Barley and Handy Sandy.’

‘Hm, Allow me to say, Mr Sax, that isn't much. I scarcely know the names.’

‘I realise that, Inspector; but perhaps you know the name of Octopus Scott?’

‘Octopus P Scott? You don't mean, Mr Sax, that you...?’

‘Of course!’

Lispington was silent. As a policeman he was, of course, bound to be

dehghted with the wonderful news that Agaton Sax was about to catch Octopus P Scott, who until that moment had always slipped away, like an eel or a goldfish, an elusive scoundrel of whom the police had not even a reliable description. But he felt it hard that he, Inspector Lispington, had not been able to catch this eel, this goldfish, for himself.

‘All right, Mr Sax. We shall be there. Depend on us. Are you coming too?’

‘Naturally I shall be there.’

There was silence for a moment. Then Inspector Lispington said, ‘Are you still there, Mr Sax?’

‘Certainly. I am sitting here thinking.’

‘I understand. Anything I can do to help?’

‘It’s a tremendously important matter.’

‘Yes, Mr Sax?’

‘I don’t know whether I should say it on the telephone.’

‘But why not, Mr Sax? There is no one else listening.’

‘No, of course not. All right then, Inspector Lispington, I’ll speak.’

Inspector Lispington listened in a fever of excitement, taking down notes on his pad.

‘I understand,’ said Lispington at length. ‘But did you say bubble gum... Oh, double come... Yes, yes, I understand now. Fantastic. This is incredible. How can it...? But that is dangerous. Two Agaton Saxes, why that’s two too many... What’s that? Forgive me No, no, no, I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings, Mr Sax I only meant... What a disaster! No, no Yes, yes Absolutely, absolutely, Mr Sax. We’ll start immediately. Not? Eleven o’clock tonight? Splendid. We’ll come to the Hotel Posh. I’ve noted the name. Thank you. Good evening, Mr Sax.’

Inspector Lispington put down the receiver. This was really amazing. Never in his long career had he been involved in anything approaching this.

He pressed a red button underneath his desk and Scotland Yard prepared to act.

8

DRAMATIC MEETING

After the gang had left their office, Agaton Sax ate a good dinner and wrote a picture postcard to his Aunt Matilda. He returned to the Hotel Posh that evening at ten o'clock. The hall porter gave him his key and said with a smile, 'Good evening, Mr Sax. The meat pie and salad you ordered are in your room. I hope it's to your taste.'

Agaton Sax slowly stroked his moustache and walked to the lift.

'Good evening, sir,' said the lift-boy. 'Up or down, Sir?

'Up, of course—I don't live in the cellar, young man.'

'No, of course not, sir, but I thought... We went down three times this afternoon to look at your bags in the baggage room.'

'Did we? Oh yes, of course. Well, down, then!' Agaton Sax had gone white. A strange feeling of unreality had begun to take possession of him. Was it possible that...? He got out of the lift and went with purposeful steps towards the baggage room and its attendant.

'But you took them with you in the car, sir, at four o'clock.'

'Yes, of course.' He returned to the lift. 'Up then.'

The lift-boy began to look frightened. Upstairs Agaton Sax went into his room. The meat pie stood on the table. He sat down and looked at it and the more he looked, the larger it seemed to grow.

'Well, well,' he murmured at last. 'This impudence is beyond everything.'

In truth he had never met a more clever enemy. A man who popped up from nowhere, a secret shadowy form, an impersonator, who had in his (Agaton Sax's) name managed to get hold of about a hundred and sixty-five thousand pounds, all of them in good notes, who took his hotel room, ordered a meat pie in his name, and carried off his two pigskin bags, resembling him so exactly that the real Agaton Sax had, for a moment, thought that he was looking at himself in duplicate.

But you little know Agaton Sax if you think he would give up in the face of this unexpected crisis. On the contrary, it seemed to fill him with new strength and energy. His brain began to work at higher speed than ever and suddenly, a few minutes before eleven o'clock in the evening, he saw through the whole mystery. Slowly he lit his Wednesday pipe and puffed hard, while he tried to fit all the bits of the puzzle together; and they fitted. Just one little bit was missing. Tomorrow afternoon he would put that in its place, if all went as he reckoned it would.

Cheered by these thoughts, he decided to roast some chestnuts on the electric stove. He quickly plugged it in and poured a bag of chestnuts on to a suitable metal plate.



But chestnuts generally develop great liveliness while they are being roasted and are inclined to pop out on to the floor. To guard himself against them, Agaton Sax took down a large shield which hung on the wall as an ornament; from behind this shield he could turn the chestnuts on the metal plate without risking a hit. Just as he was turning the last one, there came a knock at the door.

‘Yes, who’s there?’

‘Inspector Lispington from Scotland Yard.’

‘Splendid! Come right in!’

The door opened and Inspector Lispington and a uniformed policeman came in, both looking very serious.

‘Are you Agaton Sax?’ asked Inspector Lispington.

‘What do you mean by asking if I am Agaton Sax? Surely you can see for yourselves?’

Much puzzled, Agaton Sax gazed at Inspector Lispington and the police sergeant, who had now come right into the room.

‘You are *not* Agaton Sax,’ declared the Inspector with great emphasis. ‘You’re an impostor. That is what you are!’

Agaton Sax stared at him. But his unfaltering calm never left him for a moment.

‘Explain yourself, sir,’ he said with dignity.

‘Explain *yourself*, sir, if you can,’ said the Inspector furiously, ‘Your disguise cannot help you. That moustache, for example—one can see at a glance that it is false.’

‘False, sir! How dare you!’ shouted Agaton Sax angrily, ‘Look here!’ And he gave a hard tug with his thumb and first finger at his elegant moustache.

But Inspector Lispington was not at all shaken; he persisted. ‘You are a very sly and clever impersonator, I give you that! You have worked out a swindle with the greatest cunning—you have even allowed a real moustache to grow, so that you may appear as the real Sax.’

‘Now, listen, Inspector, we spoke on the telephone yesterday, did we not?’

‘Yesterday! Ha, ha, ha!’ laughed the Inspector. ‘What do I care what

happened yesterday? Did you telephone me at half past nine this evening, sir?’

‘I have not telephoned you this evening at all.’

‘There you are!’ shouted the Inspector. ‘If you had been Mr Sax you would have answered “yes” to that question. You yourself prove that you are not Mr Sax, for the true Mr Sax telephoned me at half past nine this evening and told me that the impostor was here. Therefore how can you be the real Mr Sax? Why should you say that I could come and arrest you yourself, Agaton Sax, if you were Agaton Sax and not a miserable impostor? Why should you be here if you were the real Mr Sax and why should you have rung if you were the one you are? In a word, why should you, if you...—’

‘Enough, enough. This is the most preposterous thing I have ever heard!’ cried Agaton Sax, who now began to lose patience.

‘Yes, indeed!’ the Inspector retorted. ‘Let me see your passport.’

‘Certainly. It is in my briefcase there on the bureau.’ At a sign from the Inspector, the sergeant went to the briefcase and took out the passport. Lispington took it, inspected it, and sniffed.

‘What an incredibly clumsy imitation!’ he said. ‘Look at it yourself! Do you think that I, Inspector Lispington of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, with over twenty-three years of experience behind me, would accept such a poor imitation?’ and he threw the passport over to Agaton Sax, who took it and realised to his amazement that this was *not* his own passport. Inspector Lispington was quite right—this was only a very clumsy imitation. Once more the impostor had been successful!

The Inspector continued implacably. ‘If you were really Agaton Sax, you would not have produced such a miserable forgery of your own passport; only a deceiver could produce something so bad.’

‘You are quite right,’ said Agaton Sax.

He thought feverishly. It might take several hours, yes, perhaps a whole day and night, before he could convince Inspector Lispington that he was Agaton Sax; and that delay was unthinkable. It might jeopardise the whole operation. He decided to act. In half a moment he had worked out his plan.

‘You agree?’ said Inspector Lispington.

‘Yes.’

‘Fine. Then we can set off for Scotland Yard.’

‘Naturally. Just allow me to lay this shield down on the floor.’

Agaton Sax bent down. Over the floor snaked the long flex for the bedside light, the only lamp lit in the room. In less than a fraction of a second, Agaton Sax had pulled out the electric plug and the room was plunged into darkness.

Inspector Lispington gave a shout and the sergeant lunged forward to

catch Agaton Sax, but the latter was so nimble that he was already several yards away. At the same moment a tremendous crash was heard from the window, which splintered into a thousand bits; Agaton Sax had with precise, strong aim, thrown the shield against the window pane. At the same moment a cry was heard from the direction of the window. 'See you again, Inspector Lispington!' said the voice, which then seemed to fade away into the darkness outside.

'He's jumped out!' shouted Lispington, and both he and the sergeant felt their way towards the broken window.

But in actual fact Agaton Sax was standing by the door, for in this exceptionally dangerous situation he had been helped by his ability to throw his voice like a ventriloquist. Now he slipped quickly and quietly out of the door, taking the key with him. He locked the door on the outside and ran down the stairs.

He left the hotel by the back way. It was a dark and rainy evening, and he took up his position in a back street within view of the hotel. Five minutes later he saw Lispington and the police sergeant rush out of the front entrance. Now he must act quickly. At any moment police cars might appear, so Agaton Sax ran back to the hotel yard at great speed. He climbed up the fire-escape to the roof. There he started up his helicopter and flew towards another hotel where he was well known and where he hoped to be left in peace by the police. After a graceful descent, he landed on the roof of the Hotel Stuffy. Here he was enthusiastically received.



When he had drunk a cup of tea, he decided to telephone Inspector Lispington.

'Good evening, Inspector. Agaton Sax here. Have you got hold of my double yet?'

'No, Mr Sax. It is really too dreadful. He managed to get away!'

'Really? Had he already left the hotel when you arrived?'

'No, he was in his room; but you must understand, Mr Sax, he—how shall I explain it?—he was roasting chestnuts...'

'Roasting chestnuts?'

Inspector Lispington then gave what we must regretfully call a very confused story of what had actually happened.

‘I understand,’ said Agaton Sax very seriously, ‘I understand.’

‘What an extraordinarily resourceful impostor he is!’ said Inspector Lispington. ‘Just imagine, even his false moustache was real!’

‘Indeed! Very clever,’ said Agaton Sax coldly. ‘One would almost think that it was I myself whom you are describing.’

‘Yes, true enough,’ said Inspector Lispington eagerly. ‘You saw him yourself yesterday morning on the television screen.’

‘Of course. And I am just as puzzled as you are. But don’t lose heart. We’ll get him.’

‘Certainly. Then we’ll meet tomorrow at five o’clock?’

‘Five o’clock?’

‘Yes. You yourself suggested it when you telephoned me this evening at half past nine. Five o’clock tomorrow, 227 Sloane Street, fifth floor.’

‘Yes, that’s right. See you again, Inspector!’

At the other end of the line Inspector Lispington paled,

‘What did you say, Mr Sax?’

‘I said, See you again, Inspector!’

‘Oh.’

‘Anything wrong?’

‘No, Mr Sax, no, no... It was only so strange: I thought that I recognised... that you... Ha, ha! How stupid of me! When you said those words I almost thought it was your double’s voice, as I heard it when he jumped out of the window. Just imagine, he has learnt to imitate every inflection of your voice!’

‘Yes, it is very strange, Inspector. If he should now disguise himself as you, Inspector, we should scarcely know where each other was, should we? As a matter of fact, can I be sure it is you and not he that is speaking to me now?’

‘I and not him, Mr Sax?’

‘Yes.’

‘No, that’s true,’ answered the Inspector, laying down the receiver thoughtfully.

9

THE LAST SECRET MESSAGE

On the following afternoon at three o'clock Agaton Sax was again sitting in his armchair in front of his television screen. On the stroke of 3:15 Octopus Scott entered the adjoining room, and the others arrived a few minutes later, panting and out of breath.

'Any news?' asked Octopus Scott. 'Where is the money we need and the plane?'

Slowly Charlie produced an envelope. It was very obvious that he found great difficulty in parting from it. However, he reluctantly pushed it across the table to Octopus Scott, who quickly counted the contents.

'The plane is ready,' Charlie said. 'We rented it in Croydon from a retired Channel-swimmer.'

'Rented?' roared Octopus Scott. 'I said buy, didn't I? Well, have you at least bought a copy of the *Bykoping Post*, or whatever the paper calls itself?'

'Here,' said Charlie and handed him the paper.

Octopus Scott pulled it towards him and immediately gave a cry of astonishment; then another cry, this time of consternation; and then a third cry, of suspicion.

Between these cries, he said, 'What's this? A new drawing has been inserted! How's that possible? Has Stud Slogan appeared again? But the secret message? How did he know what he was to say? Or did either of you get hold of him last night?' They both shook their heads. 'The code book—give me the code book!' Octopus Scott ordered. He quickly turned over the pages, compared, and wrote, while his face became a rather strange grey-green colour. Finally he said in a loud, indignant voice, 'Just listen to this secret message he has cooked up: "Go Bykoping immediately and give diamond to Stud Slogan"!'

The others paled, one after the other, and were obliged to loosen their collars, so strong was their emotion.

'The rascal!' shrieked Octopus Scott, boiling with rage. 'He intends to get hold of the diamond for his own use. What impudence! What a hardened criminal!'

'What if Stud Slogan and Agaton Sax have gone in together!' cried Charlie, and was so terrified by the mere thought that he upset his chair and lay grovelling on the floor.

Octopus Scott considered Charlie's words for a brief second; but his

imagination boggled at such a terrible combination. Slowly he chewed his cigar to pieces, and then: 'To the plane! We fly to Stockholm—or whatever the place is called—now, this minute. Are all your passports forged and in order?'

The three scoundrels grabbed various objects from among the office furniture and all three hurried from the room. Agaton Sax quickly wrote a few lines on a piece of paper, which he attached to the television screen:

Dear Inspector,

When you find this we shall already be on international waters or rather high above them. Octopus Scott and his confederates are flying to Bykoping. You will realise that it is my duty to follow them there.

Yours ever, Agaton Sax.

Then he immediately took a taxi to his hotel and half an hour later was sitting at the controls of his helicopter. He circled once or twice over the centre of the capital, and then set his course towards the north-east. As he passed over London Airport he received the following radio message:

'Who's there?'

He answered: 'Agaton Sax in helicopter XP677.'

'Course?'

'North-east. To Bykoping.'

There was silence for a moment. Then the radio telegraphist from the ground came on again.

'Agaton Sax? You flew over here this morning?'

'No. That was my double. An extremely dangerous person.' Silence again. Then the telegraphist asked inexorably:

'How can I know it is not *you* who are the impostor?'

'You can't know, but you can give me the weather report.'

'The telegraphist gave him this unwillingly:

'You will soon be flying towards a belt of extremely low pressure, about 703 millibars. If you are really Agaton Sax, it is my duty to warn you. If you are an impostor, I hope you will fly right into the low pressure.'

'Thank you. Did my double say where he was going?'

'No, only that he was in a great hurry.'

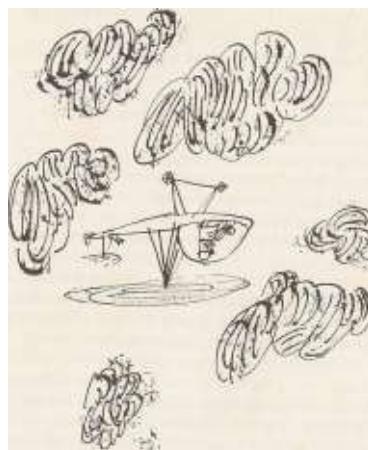
Agaton Sax brooded over this as he flew across the coast of England, which soon disappeared behind him. During his many years as a fighter of crime, he had flown innumerable times over both land and water, so that he was used to meeting all kinds of weather. Nevertheless, it was with a certain anxiety that he saw the mighty belt of low pressure on the horizon, when he was only halfway across the North Sea. Gigantically heavy clouds were banking up in front of him. They came

nearer and nearer, and after a time he could not see his hand in front of him, still less the sea below him. A terrible storm had blown up. The helicopter was thrown about like a swing in the air, and the swinging eventually became so violent that Agaton Sax had to fasten his bowler hat down under his chin with elastic.

However, he kept quite cool through everything—even when, to his surprise, he found that the helicopter had turned topsy-turvy, so that the propeller was facing downwards. This caused the machine to rise with furious speed to the great height of 1,250 feet above sea level before Agaton Sax could right it again.

Unfortunately, he discovered half an hour later that this quick turning upside down had caused a lot of petrol to run out. He calculated quickly that the petrol which remained would not be enough to carry him to the west coast of Sweden; he would be obliged to land in Denmark.

No sooner said than done. He altered his course and an hour later flew in over the Danish coast. He made a perfect landing on a turnip field and walked to the nearest inn, where he ordered petrol and tried to telephone to his Aunt Matilda. There was no answer, although he rang repeatedly throughout the remainder of the day. Finally he went to bed.



The following morning he flew to Malmo, in the south of Sweden. At nine o'clock he was at the Central Station, waiting for the train due to bring the usual number of copies of the *Bykoping Post* to Malmo. At last the bundle of newspapers arrived and he opened one with a hand shaking with excitement. There, on the front page, was a picture by Stud Slogan, and the caption underneath read:

'One of the kings of Mid North-Kombadja liked partots. He owned twelve, all of which he taught to recite poems addressed to himself. Then there was a revolution in the country and King Kombadja was defeated. A rebel named Gam-

Rumsa was proclaimed king. Each day all the parrots in the palace sat there reciting poems addressed to King Kombadja, for they could not learn to say the name Gam-Rumsa; so the latter decided to change his name, and he, also, called himself King Kombadja.'

Agaton Sax had not his code-book with him, but, after thinking for a few moments, he was able to translate Stud Slogan's last secret message. According to B-System AC 73 D, this caption held the following secret message to Jim and Slim:

'Hand over diamond to Slogan in Bykoping Park on Friday twelve o'clock.'

Friday, that was today. Agaton Sax looked at the clock, and again tried to telephone Aunt Matilda. Still no reply.

He got into his helicopter and rushed off towards Bykoping. His enforced stay in Denmark had actually done him no harm. If nothing unforeseen happened, he had still plenty of time at his disposal; but he spent every moment brooding over the matter of his double.

Suddenly his hand flew up and he beat his forehead. Now he understood, all was clear as daylight. How could he have failed to see the connection?

10

FESTIVITIES IN BYKOPING SCHOOL

Let us now return to Octopus Scott and his followers. You will remember that these very questionable gentlemen had thought it advisable to shake the dust of London off their feet and try their luck in Bykoping. Their one aim in life now was to lay hands upon the Koh-Mih-Nor diamond, the jewel which, owing to its extreme rarity—there was only one in the world—was said to be worth some six million pounds. Their confederates, Jim and Slim, had been given orders through Stud Slogan's code message in the *Bykoping Post* to get hold of the Stone. This apparently they had done; but Stud Slogan had meanwhile shown his hand. Convinced that his chief, Octopus Scott, did not read the *Bykoping Post*, he had distorted the secret messages, or rather invented them himself, in order to get Jim and Slim to hand over the precious diamond to himself, Stud Slogan, by the latest edition he had ordered the two thieves, now in Stockholm, to go to the park in Bykoping, so as to meet him there and give him the stolen diamond. As we already know, Octopus Scott had read the *Bykoping Post* and he was particularly looking forward to the new edition on this June morning at nine o'clock, as he waited on the platform of the Central Station in Stockholm for the train which was to bring that day's papers to the capital. At the first opportunity he snatched a copy out of the hands of the newspaper seller, read the caption about parrots, consulted the code book, and then read the message to Charlie and Sandy.

'In three hours the diamond will be ours!' he whispered, whereupon all three rushed out to the airport, where they had left their plane, and started it up.

At 11:30 they landed outside Bykoping; Octopus Scott studied the landscape sharply from under his bushy eyebrows. Obviously it was Bykoping which lay before him. He saw the high church tower, and further to the left a lower tower which rose over the little market place.

Octopus Scott lit a cigar and its singularly unpleasant smell fouled the clean air above the meadow where they had landed. 'Is that really supposed to be a town? What's the use of it, anyway?'

But Charlie wriggled uneasily, and loosened his collar by inserting his forefinger between it and his throat.

'Best to get away from here,' he muttered, throwing an arduous look along the road.

‘Forward!’ commanded Octopus Scott, whereupon the little group moved towards the town.

‘Ten minutes later they were walking briskly up the main street, which was almost entirely empty.

‘The map!’ said Octopus Scott. ‘Consult the map, Charlie!’ Charlie unfolded the plan of Bykoping and pointed out their course.

‘Third street to the left, then straight on and past that yellow house,’ he said with a little shiver of distaste. Charlie did not relish this visit to Agaton Sax’s home town. The yellow house was the school, which, with its red gables and broad white steps, presented a striking appearance.

‘What a very strange house!’ said freckly Sandy.

‘Why?’ said Octopus Scott,

‘Because some kind of tree is growing out of the steps,’ said Sandy. ‘Right up out of the floor, so to speak. I wonder what kind of tree would do that?’

Octopus Scott and Charlie looked at the school steps—they were decorated with whole birch trees. A number of fathers, mothers, and children, all very well turned out, were assembled in the school yard.

‘There is what we want,’ said Octopus Scott, pointing towards a little park just ahead of them. It was quite deserted. Octopus Scott looked at *his* wristwatch; its hands pointing to 11:30.

‘Jim and Slim should be here within half an hour,’ he said; and he added with a sly, wicked smile, ‘Stud Slogan will be here too, to fetch the diamond. So there’ll be two of us, so to speak, on the same job.’

Charlie wiped cold perspiration from his forehead. The next moment Octopus Scott said, ‘Hush! What was that?’ They all listened intently. Charlie shivered. They heard music which seemed to be coming from up the street, and the children in the school yard pulled themselves free from their parents and rushed out into the street to look. ‘What’s all this nonsense?’ muttered Octopus Scott and again looked at his watch.

The music came nearer and nearer. Bykoping’s town band came into view, marching to the notes of the national anthem.

‘They are coming here,’ said Charlie in a hoarse voice, his teeth beginning to chatter.

‘Silence!’ hissed Octopus Scott. At that moment something else had caught his attention.

From the schoolhouse came three gentlemen dressed in black, carrying bunches of flowers and hurrying across the well-raked gravel of the school yard. They were eagerly waving to someone ahead, and approached the park quickly, with almost dancing footsteps.



'Who do they think they are waving to?' asked Octopus Scott in an irate tone.

'To us,' answered Charlie, whose voice now became almost inaudible.

'Idiot!'

But even as Octopus Scott spoke, he paled, for the three black-coated gentlemen were waving more and more eagerly, and were now almost running towards Scott and his two companions. The foremost of the three stretched out his right hand to Octopus Scott's right hand, and seized and shook it heartily for a long time, to the criminal's amazement and indignation.

'Welcome, welcome, Professor Toodleworthington,' the first man cried. 'And welcome to your two colleagues, Professors Best and West!' he added, pressing Charlie's and Sandy's hands, which at this moment were cold and damp.

'Forgive me,' said Octopus Scott (this was the first and only time in all his life he uttered that phrase), 'forgive me but...'

He intended to say that there must be some mistake; but the black-coated gentleman interrupted him at once.

'It is not you who should ask for forgiveness, Professor Toodleworthington, but we. I am the Mayor and these other gentlemen are the Town Clerk and the Chairman of the Education Committee. We could not see you at the station, but then we understood that you had not come by train. Some children noticed three foreigners here, and we realised that you must have come by car, not by train. Splendid!'

At this moment the town band marched into the park, still playing. Octopus Scott chewed more and more wildly at his big cigar, and Charlie again tried to loosen his collar with his fingers.

The music stopped and the Mayor lifted his hand and addressed the crowd that had gathered around them:

'Ladies and gentlemen, we have great pleasure in welcoming that very distinguished American, Professor Thomas J Toodleworthington, with his two colleagues, Professors Best and West. They are here in Sweden studying Swedish schools and methods of education, and they

have had the great kindness to come to our end-of-term celebrations which, as you all know, are taking place this year just twenty-five years after the school was first opened.' He turned to the three criminals. 'You are more than welcome, gentlemen!' He said all this in Swedish, of course; but he translated his own words immediately into English.

Now Octopus Scott could grasp fully the situation. After further handshakes and compliments, the Mayor said, 'Your speciality is mental arithmetic, isn't it, Professor Toodleworthington?'

'That's right,' answered Octopus Scott. 'Calculations, mathematics with special emphasis on high numbers...'

'And you, Professor Best,' went on the Mayor—'What are you looking out for particularly in Swedish schools?'

Freckled Sandy started.

'I? Er... er... yes... hm... What to say... How...'

'I say...'

'Excuse me,' said the Chairman of the Education Committee, 'perhaps you mean analysis and grammar?'

'Yes, yes,' answered freckled Sandy, feverishly blowing his nose, while Octopus Scott glared at him.

'And you, Professor West?' said the Town Clerk turning with great politeness to Charlie. 'What type of lessons do you specially want to hear in the Swedish schools?'

'I?' said Charlie, going white. 'Er... hm... perhaps... to... er... hm... geography, I would say. Geography and subtraction. Those were my best subjects in my infant school.'

Octopus Scott was seized with a very loud attack of coughing and kicked Charlie's ankle hard.

'Really?' cried the Chairman and the Town Clerk at the same moment.

'But I am also very interested in stories of all sorts,' said Charlie, who was growing reckless now that he had realised that these were not the police, as he had at first thought.

'European and Swedish history?' cried the Mayor and the Chairman.

'Yes, you know, stories about Swedish Kings and Queens, about war and revolutions, et cetera,' said Charlie.

'Naturally, Professor West,' said the Chairman, and looked at the Mayor in some surprise.

All six now went off towards the school, Octopus Scott casting angry glances back towards the park, where no Jim or Slim had yet appeared, although it was now almost 11:55.

'Keep calm!' he muttered to Charlie. 'We can't get away from all this yet; it would arouse suspicion. We'll have to go back to the park later on.'

As they walked up the school steps to inspect the various classrooms,

the Chairman of the Education Committee said, 'We have a very distinguished person here in our little town, as you probably know.'

'Yes, he is known throughout the world, at any rate in certain circles,' added the Mayor.

'Indeed?'

'Yes, we mean Agaton Sax, the detective,' the Town Clerk explained with pride.

'Indeed?' murmured Octopus Scott.

'What is the matter?' cried the Chairman of the Education Committee, supporting Charlie by a helpful grip of his arm. 'Are you unwell, Professor West? A glass of water for Professor West! Quickly—he's fainting!'



'Unfortunately Agaton Sax is not at home just at present. He appears to be away on some little job,' explained the Mayor with a meaning smile, 'But if he had known you were coming today, you may be sure that he would have been here to give you a warm welcome, so to speak. Ha, ha, ha!'

'You are very kind,' Octopus Scott said icily.

Outwardly he was cool and calm, but inwardly he was gnashing his teeth. With a last glance towards the park he went into the schoolhouse with the others, the Chairman still supporting Charlie, who showed serious signs of tottering backwards down the steps.

'While you are in our town, I really hope that you will have time to take a look at our little prison,' said the Mayor in charming tones. 'It is not large, naturally, but it is absolutely modern. Most of those who have tried it say it is quite a model little prison.'

11

AUNT MATILDA TELLS A STRANGE STORY

In order to fully understand the significance of the strange events which took place in Bykoping between 11:45 and 1:10 on this last day of the school term, 12th June 1959, we must first carefully follow Agaton Sax's doings between nine and twelve that same morning.

Hampered by persistent head winds, his helicopter took a rather longer time than usual to cover the stretch between Malmo and Bykoping. However, Agaton Sax landed on Johansson's meadow at 11:45, having seen from the air the gang's plane in the same meadow. He parked his *Hermes* beside it and hastened home.

He took the stairs up to his office in two leaps, and shouted at the wall, 'Aunt Matilda—are you there, Aunt Matilda?'

'Here!' he heard her decided voice.

She was standing behind the window curtains and now stepped out, holding in her hand the large office telescope.

'What's this!' cried Agaton Sax, amazed. 'Why are you standing looking through the editorial telescope?'



'Look yourself!' Aunt Matilda told him, and handed him the telescope.

And there was indeed something to look at! When he turned the telescope towards the park, he was just in time to see the black-coated gentlemen rush forward to the three criminals, bearing bunches of flowers in their hands. 'But this is terrible!' cried Agaton Sax. 'What a scandal! What can the Mayor mean by giving a civic welcome to such rogues?'

He was deeply puzzled and upset. Then suddenly an idea struck him and he swung round to Aunt Matilda.

'But why... why are you standing there and looking just at this moment? How could you know that it was exactly at twelve o'clock

that..?'

She looked at him, and then shrugged her shoulders.

'Little Agaton,' she said, 'Well you don't think that you are the only person in this house who has a brain? Surely you don't think you are the only one who can read a code message? You told me yourself the system that should be used. I used it.'

'Of course, Aunt, of course, of course... I only thought that... but no matter, Aunt Matilda. Tell me quickly: where is Stud Slogan, the man who does the drawings and writes the secret messages? Does he send the drawings by post or does he bring them in himself?'

'He sent them by post. But last night he came himself.'

'Last night? Tell me!' cried Agaton Sax. 'What happened? What did he say? No, wait—where are they going now?'

He focused the telescope on the park again, and now he saw the whole company moving towards the school. He gave a sigh of relief. 'Now, tell me!'

'Last night at ten o'clock, when I had drunk my evening camomile tea,' said Aunt Matilda, 'I heard someone moving up here in the editor's room—I had the speaking tube connected, you understand. "Oh, are you there, Agaton?" I cried, for I thought you had, as usual, come back from abroad without first writing or telephoning or even sending a telegram. When you did not answer, I realised that it wasn't you; and then I thought it would be best to ring the police, which I did; but Sergeant Antonsson was away on holiday—the impudence of it! To take a holiday when criminals were around!—and then I thought that the best thing I could do was to take the matter into my own hands. This might of course be a really dangerous thief, perhaps a foreigner, so I had to be careful, and therefore I decided to act with cunning. I said into the speaking tube: "That's splendid, Agaton, I'll get you your evening coffee; I'll be up with it in a minute. I won't disturb you, I'll put it outside the door in the corridor, on the table, beside the pot of firns." So I made a strong cup of coffee and went up with it.'

'Do you mean, Aunt Matilda, that you actually offered this infamous rogue a large cup of your best coffee?'

'Certainly, dear Agaton, but I had put two of my most quickly-working sleeping pills into it, the ones I got from Dr Well when I had a sore throat; they put you to sleep in two minutes.'

'But how could the criminal believe that you really thought that it was me and not him?'

'You're much too slow, Agaton. Because I deluded him into thinking that I was deaf, of course. I said, "Well, Agaton you hear me although I can't hear you, because I've left my hearing-aid in my bedroom. But here at any rate is your evening coffee. Good night, Agaton." Then I went downstairs again and waited. After a moment or two I heard him

open the door very carefully and take the cup. I waited a few more minutes, and then I went upstairs again and knocked on the door. A drowsy voice said in English: "Come in, come in!"

'So I went in and there he sat, that Stud Slogan or whatever he calls himself, at any rate the man who sold me the pictures. Naturally I recognised him; but he waved in a friendly way to me and said "Good evening, little Aunt!" I asked him if he had drunk his coffee, and he said, yes, he had. So then I asked him to go down to the cellar and fetch some wood for the fire and he said that he would certainly do that much for me. It would be a pleasure to do anything for me. He was very kind, just as one always is before going to sleep after taking those pills. Then we went down to the cellar together, and I led him into the laboratory where you usually sit and examine footprints and fingerprints and things of that sort, and a minute later he was asleep.'

Agaton Sax stared at his aunt. This was indeed quite amazing. Aunt Matilda had shown an insight and a resource worthy of the very highest praise.

'And then?' he asked. 'Is he still here?'

Aunt Matilda shook her head.

'No, he's gone.'

'Gone!' cried Agaton Sax in consternation. 'He's really gone? But how—?'

'Keep calm,' said Aunt Matilda. 'Don't be so impatient. Everything can be explained. This morning when Johansson was setting the newspaper type and had come to the column *Good Carrots in Bjköping*, which I had written myself, several letters were spoiled for him in the printing machine.'

'Spoiled?'

'Yes, they jumped about like this:

GoOd caRRots in BYKQPING.

Johansson realised that this must be caused by the person who was banging on the floor.

'Banging on the floor?'

'Yes, or on the ceiling. There was someone banging on the cellar ceiling just underneath the printing press. So Johansson went down into the cellar and listened, and then he realised that the noise was coming from the laboratory, and he asked: "Is anyone there?" There was an answer but he could not understand it, so he asked again: "Is anyone in there knocking?" Then Stud Slogan answered in English that there was, and Johansson thought this so unusual that he opened the door to the laboratory and Stud Slogan slipped out immediately, and Johansson went upstairs and went on with the printing, so all was well.'

'My goodness me!' shouted Agaton Sax. 'One of the most cunning

criminals of the century! But I don't understand. The caption about meeting in the park—when did Stud Slogan do that?"

"Have patience and I'll tell you all," said Aunt Matilda. "You've always been impatient, Agaton. When you were fourteen years old, for example, you could never sit still while I told you lovely stories..."

"But, dear Aunt Matilda, there is need for haste now."

"—No, even in those days you always wanted to be out riding in your special sports car, which you had built yourself in the yard. Impatience has always been your great fault, Agaton. Now where was I before you interrupted me? Oh yes, that Stud Slogan slipped away this morning at about eight o'clock and I've not set eyes on him since. He had a little travelling bag in his hand. Johansson told me."

"My goodness me!" cried Agaton Sax again. "What does it all mean? Stud Slogan himself gave Jim and Slim orders to be in the park today at twelve o'clock—therefore he obviously planned to be in the park at twelve o'clock himself to fetch the diamond. It is now three minutes to twelve. I must go immediately..."

"Agaton, today's drawing is...—"

But Agaton Sax heard nothing. He now stood as if welded to the office telescope, gazing at the scene which was now being played out in the park. It had been empty since the great crowd had gone off to the school. Now two small figures appeared behind the rhododendron bushes. Their grey coats stood out against the green background. They were looking around them furtively. Even at this distance it seemed obvious that they were the two diamond thieves, Jim and Slim.

12

THE KOH-MIH-NOR DIAMOND

Let us now return to the end-of-term festivities in the school. As the three foreigners were supposed to be Americans, it had been decided that they should listen to a lesson in English. They sat down beside the blackboard; but even while the teacher, Mr Appletree, was bowing to his distinguished guests, he was privately wondering how such persons could possibly have become professors. He was, however, accustomed to the fact that neither the Mayor, nor the Town Clerk, nor the Chairman of the Education Committee took him into their confidence and so he said, 'Stand up and greet these very famous men.'

'Thank you, thank you,' said Octopus Scott with forced friendliness.

'And now we will translate the first sentence in our book into English. You start, Bengi.'

'Charlie is a very bad boy.'

'Right.'

Charlie grew pale and convulsively clutched the arms of his chair. Octopus Scott stretched his neck forward in an attempt to look through the window and see whether anything was happening in the park; and freckled Sandy turned his hat round and round in his dirty fingers.

Then something happened which was long to be remembered as one of the oddest happenings in the history of Bykoping.

Suddenly a man appeared in the doorway, and his glance wandered strangely from one person there to another, as if looking for someone or something he could recognise. When Mr Appletree saw him, he smiled a big smile and exclaimed in English, 'Dear me, what do I see!'

The man stared at him and then said also in English, 'Where am I?'

Mr Appletree thought that this was all a joke, and that the visitor had meant to ask 'Who am I?' in order that the teacher could ask his class the question. So Mr Appletree turned happily to his pupils, and asked, 'Who is this man?'

And the class answered all together:

'This man is Mr Agaton Sax!'

The three criminals gazed at him as if turned to stone, but Octopus Scott was not the man easily to acknowledge defeat.

'Keep calm!' he muttered to Charlie and Sandy, each of whom looked as if he were about to fall to the ground in a dead faint. 'He has not recognised us. Besides, there are three of us.'

The intelligent reader has, of course, already understood that the

stranger was Agaton Sax's double. He nodded absently to the children and then his glance passed round the room until it fell on the three criminals by the blackboard. At once he stiffened and in a second had collected himself sufficiently to bow politely to the master, saying, 'Thank you, sir, thank you, children.' Thereupon he disappeared into the corridor. Here he grasped his forehead distractedly, shook himself vigorously, and finally rushed out into the yard, and thence into the town. As he walked, it seemed as if his brain cleared, for he went into a tobacconist's and bought the day's paper.

But inside the school Octopus Scott had stood up. He could no longer go on listening to lessons in this absurd way, when duty called him in another direction. He turned to the Mayor and the two other gentlemen: 'Please excuse us, gentlemen, for half an hour. We have been journeying for long and would like a little time in the hotel for a wash and brush-up before we inspect the prison.'

'Naturally, Professor Toodleworthington,' answered all three gentlemen with the utmost politeness. Octopus Scott and his companions bowed with the falsest of smiles and hurried out into the yard.

'Over there in the park!' whispered Octopus Scott. 'There they are, standing by the rhododendron bushes!' They rushed to the park. Quite right. There stood Jim and Slim.

'At last!' Octopus Scott burst out. 'Have you the diamond?'

'Yes, sir, indeed, sir,' Jim assured him, and pulled out a box from his pocket.

'Six million, sir,' he said proudly. It was good to see that the chief himself had come to fetch the diamond.

'The paper told us this morning that we were to hand over the diamond to Stud Slogan. Was that wrong, sir?'

'That scoundrel!' said Octopus Scott sharply. 'He tried to double-cross me, but he has not succeeded!'

Octopus Scott opened the box. There lay the diamond, the celebrated Koh-Mih-Nor diamond sought after by the whole world. Tremblingly Octopus Scott took it between his thumb and first finger and turned it in the sunshine. It glittered with an unearthly lustre. A long sigh of happiness came from the depth of Scott's being. He did not seem at first to hear Slim's voice: "What about our reward, sir? You promised us ten per cent, which makes £600,000. Have you that sum on you, sir?"

Octopus Scott started. 'On me? You're crazy. We'll meet at the Central Station in Stockholm tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, and I'll arrange the payment and give you new orders.'

'O.K., sir.'

Octopus Scott seemed to have woken from his dream of happiness.

He adjusted himself to reality and lines of strong decision became visible round his mouth. He looked round. No Stud Slogan. No Agaton Sax. He rubbed his hands. 'Splendid!' he said. 'Agaton Sax had no suspicion that we were going to collect the diamond here. Apparently Stud Slogan is in the neighbourhood, but he has not dared to show himself. The coup has succeeded, but we have no time to lose! To the airstrip!' They rushed along the narrow streets, thinking themselves unseen; but that was not the case. There was someone who saw them, and that person was Agaton Sax. He had followed the whole of the previous scene through his great editorial telescope; and now the time had come for action.

But just as he was going to act, he saw something quite unexpected. Three men suddenly appeared at a corner of the street ahead of the criminals. Their faces were hard with determination as they bore down upon their prey. One of the three men was Police Inspector Lispington from Scotland Yard, who had flown from London; the other two were clearly his assistants. Agaton Sax halted for a moment speechless with surprise. He had not expected that the Inspector would take a hand in this way.



But something strange was also happening *behind* the criminals. A large crowd had appeared, hotfoot on the track of the three of them. It was led by a woman waving an umbrella. She was shouting furiously: 'My shopping bag! He took my shopping bag! I saw him myself! It was that freckled one over there, the wretch. Arrest him! Arrest him, I say!'

'All is lost!' shouted Charlie, while Sandy threw the stolen shopping bag down into an area.

'You ass!' Octopus Scott hissed to Sandy. 'How could you have bothered to take a shopping bag which is scarcely worth five and ninepence, when we have the Koh-Mih-Nor diamond!' He looked round him wildly.

There seemed no possibility of escape. The street was so narrow that it did not allow for dodging about; the houses had not the kind of fronts that offered footholds even to desperate climbers. Besides which, the crowd behind them was determined and angry, for the lady whose shopping bag had been stolen was much esteemed in Bykoping and

neighbourhood. Last but not least, coming towards them were Police Inspector Lispington and his two men, and at the sight of them, both Charlie and Sandy stood as if petrified.

But Octopus Scott was not one to give in. He made a last attempt to escape the law. With one soaring leap he reached a window on the first floor of a house; then he swung himself up to the next floor, and climbed along the wall, trying to get over to the neighbouring house; but the two British police constables were after him immediately. Three minutes later the police inspector received him, saying coldly, 'And the Koh-Mih-Nor diamond, Mr Octopus Scott?'

'What are you talking about?'

'About the diamond, which you doubtless have on you.'

'The Koh-Mih-Nor diamond? You are crazy, sir.'

'Not at all, I arrest you in the name of the law and demand that you hand the diamond to me immediately. Whatever you say will be taken down in writing and may be used in evidence.'

At this moment the Mayor arrived on the scene with Sergeant Round of Bykoping, who was acting in Sergeant Antonsson's absence. They also helped to surround the criminals.

'Is it possible that Professor Best has stolen a shopping bag?' asked the Mayor in utter confusion.

Agaton Sax now hurried up. At the sight of him Police Inspector Lispington started, and the three criminals paled.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Lispington. 'Are you here already Mr Sax?'

'Then the Inspector's face broke into a large and friendly smile—a triumphant smile—and he added, 'I am really very glad that I can introduce Octopus Scott and his companions to you, Mr Sax. I have just arrested them; and allow me to tell you that I have thereby caught the gang who stole the incomparable Koh-Mih-Nor diamond! Octopus Scott,' continued Lispington in a dreadful voice, 'give me the diamond immediately!'

Meanwhile the Mayor was still looking at the three men in bewilderment, 'Octopus P Scott?' he said helplessly. 'But this is Professor Toodleworthington! Has he also stolen a shopping bag?'

Pale and dumb, Octopus Scott had brought out the diamond from his pocket, tears rolling down his cheeks.

Lispington took it and held it up to the sun and it seemed as if the light reflected in this little stone lighted up the whole of Bykoping.

Lispington pulled himself together. This was the proudest moment in the whole of his career, and how glad he was that at last he had shown himself superior to Agaton Sax—in Agaton Sax's own town too; on his own beat, so to speak!

Agaton Sax stood there, quite still and silent. His sharp eyes took in everything. Not a muscle in his face, not a movement in his eyes

betrayed what his feelings were at this moment. Suddenly he turned to Lispington: 'Will you excuse me for a moment? I must go and attend to my paper, which is just about to go to press. Won't you come and see me in my office in about an hour's time?'

'I shall be delighted, Mr Sax,' said Lispington with over-exaggerated politeness and a deep bow.

Agaton Sax rushed home. He took the telescope and hurried up onto the roof. From there he knew that he could see each street, each house, every little corner of Bykoping. He put the telescope to his eye. He saw the great crowd with Lispington, the Mayor, Octopus Scott, and his fellow rogues, as well as Sergeant Round. It was obvious that the whole town had congregated round the detective and the criminals. There was not a person to be seen in the other streets. Everywhere was utterly deserted. Agaton Sax examined every inch...

'There—there! Just as he had expected: there were two men hurrying away from the town, looking round every few minutes, afraid of being followed, and probably hoping for some car or bicycle they could steal for their getaway. But there are few cars and cycles in Bykoping; and those few are kept locked up anyway. Agaton Sax nodded to himself. The two men were Jim and Slim. They had not dared to wait for the train. They were leaving the town on foot.

Agaton Sax put down the big office telescope. He rubbed his hands, and a minute later he was on his way down the stairs.

13

COLD PORRIDGE COMES IN USEFUL

Agaton Sax had two motor cycles and he now took the one with a sidecar. He swung it out of the yard into the street and was soon racing along towards the outskirts of Bykoping.

Now he saw the two criminals ahead of him and noted that they were certainly in a very great hurry. At the moment when he first caught sight of them, they were eagerly examining a bicycle propped up against a barn; but they soon saw that it had no back wheel, and so they came quickly back on to the high road again to resume their hurried walk. Agaton Sax approached the two men at a good pace and waved to them in a friendly way as he passed them. Then he stopped his motor cycle and turned back towards them, waving again.

‘Are you by any chance going to Torby?’ he asked kindly. ‘It’s the next village, you know.’ They shook their heads to show they did not understand Swedish. Agaton Sax then asked them in English, whereupon they told him they were making for Stockholm.

‘Splendid!’ cried Agaton Sax. ‘I also am on my way there. Would you like a lift?’

The two men, who naturally did not recognise him and had probably scarcely even heard his name, exchanged a quick glance. As the tubby little stranger seemed so friendly, they thanked him and agreed; whereupon the short one, Jim, settled himself behind Agaton Sax, and the tall one, Slim, got into the sidecar.

Is it necessary to say that Agaton Sax, after driving for a few minutes, turned off down a side road which led back to Bykoping? Is it necessary to say that the criminals gradually noticed this?

‘Keep calm, gentlemen!’ said Agaton Sax. ‘I am only going to fetch a reserve carburettor from the garage in Bykoping.’

He increased his speed and drove at eighty miles an hour into the town, while Jim and Slim heaped curses on him. He stopped outside the prison. He then turned to Slim in the sidecar, pointed a revolver at him, and said, ‘Now, Slim, hand me that object you have in your pocket. Hurry up! You know what I mean.’

The terrified Slim obeyed him as if he had been hypnotised. Agaton Sax pushed the object into his own pocket, after which he led the two gentlemen into the prison.

At three o’clock that same afternoon, Agaton Sax was sitting in his office when the door bell rang. Inspector Lispington came in.

'I must say that you are extraordinarily like your double, Mr Sax,' he said jokingly, while he sat down and stretched out his long legs across the floor, Agaton Sax smiled one of his enigmatic smiles.

'And who do you think my double is?' he asked. Lispington wrinkled his forehead. 'That is the only question still troubling me,' he admitted. 'I have got hold of the Koh-Mih-Nor diamond—with your assistance, of course,' he added with a polite gesture of the hand. 'But who your double is I do not yet know. Have you any theory yourself, Mr Sax?' He looked at his host expectantly. The latter smiled again.

'Naturally I have a theory,' he said. 'Well, I would even go further than that. I know who he is.'

'Really? And who...?'

'I'll tell you tomorrow,' said Agaton Sax sweetly. 'Do you also know where he is?' asked Lispington. 'Naturally!'

Agaton Sax puffed slowly at his Friday pipe. His large blue eyes gazed at Lispington's long legs, while he told some carefully selected parts of the story of how he had traced the gang; and the two gentlemen agreed that they must next try to track down the relatively harmless Stud Slogan. He was now surely unemployed, since his chief, together with the whole gang, had been captured.

'Tomorrow I shall have the pleasure of handing my double over to you,' said Agaton Sax as Lispington rose to go. 'I suppose you are staying at the *Rooms for Travellers* here in Bykoping? Splendid. And take care of the diamond!'

'You may be sure I shall.' Lispington gave a satisfied chuckle as he took himself off. Dusk sank down over Bykoping, and it was quite dark by ten o'clock. Agaton Sax was sitting at his editor's table, writing. At eleven o'clock he called to the wall, 'Are you there, Aunt Matilda?'

'Yes,' answered the wall.

'Will you please come up at once!'

Aunt Matilda soon appeared in the doorway. She was drying her hands on her flowered apron.

'Is everything ready down there?' asked Agaton Sax.

'Yes, Agaton. The porridge is cooling; that horrible man can now come at any time—if he dares. I am ready for him.'

'Excellent.'

Agaton Sax nodded contentedly. Then once more he went through his instructions for catching Stud Slogan, Aunt Matilda nodding after each point.

'You can depend on me, Agaton,' she said in a voice that would have made any law-breaker shiver.

'Splendid. I think he should be here within the hour.'

Aunt Matilda went down into the sitting-room. The clock ticked on in the silence. By degrees all the lights in Bykoping went out, one after

the other, and everywhere was dark; only the editorial window of the *Bykoping Post* still showed a light.

Agaton Sax sat there, sunk down deeply in his green editorial chair. He was thinking.

At 11:30 he put out his own light. The window was open. No breath of air moved the curtains, no sound could be heard. All was absolutely silent.

Agaton Sax looked towards the window. In one hand he held a revolver, in the other a large pocket torch.

His bullet-proof wristwatch with its luminous figures now showed exactly 11:58. The hour of midnight was approaching.

Suddenly he heard a tiny sound from the yard down below. He stiffened and rose slowly from his chair, then stood absolutely still, listening intently. He heard it again.

It was a faint clicking—was it gravel beneath the soles of a criminal foot?

Yes, those were footsteps. Someone was creeping carefully across the yard, stopping now by the back door. Then there was silence again. Agaton Sax strained his ears to the uttermost. The silence was complete. He crept across the floor and went carefully down the stairs. When he was halfway down he stopped, for now he heard a new sound. It was the sound of a skeleton key being put into the keyhole, and now it was being slowly turned. The back door opened, and there was silence again. Agaton Sax continued his way down the stairs. Then he stopped in the hall and listened again.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a tremendous noise. It sounded like a small but sudden waterfall; and at the same time a man's half suffocated voice was heard shouting, apparently in fury and terror. High above these sounds, Aunt Matilda's voice could be heard: 'I have him, Agaton! I have him! Here! I've caught the rogue; hurry up!'

Agaton Sax rushed forward, his pocket torch lighting the way ahead. He saw what he had expected. There was Aunt Matilda banging with all her might at a large yellow plastic pail. Under this pail was hidden the head of a man, and huge streams of cold porridge were running down over his shoulders and the rest of his clothes. The man was fighting wildly with his arms, trying to free himself from the pail; his cries were partly deadened by the porridge, which a few moments ago had filled the pail.

'Bravo, Aunt Matilda!' cried Agaton Sax. 'You have caught one of the world's most dangerous criminals—my own double!'

Entirely incomprehensible words, which, however, seemed to be in English, were forcing their way out of the yellow plastic pail. While Agaton Sax superintended the operation with his revolver raised, Aunt Matilda lifted the pail away. A face entirely covered with porridge then

appeared. The man began wiping it angrily with his sleeve, and it could soon be seen that he was weeping with anger and fury. Agaton Sax looked on coldly. At last the man's face was fully revealed.

Agaton Sax gave a little cry of despair. The porridge-man was Detective Inspector Arthur H Lispington!



14

A DOUBLE UNMASKING

‘What! You here?’ cried Agaton Sax.

‘Yes, it’s me,’ answered Inspector Lispington, greatly annoyed; ‘but what about you, Mr Sax? How can you justify a welcome so—so unfriendly, to put it mildly?’

‘What is the rogue saying?’ cried Aunt Matilda. ‘Is he trying to wriggle out of it?’

She swung the pail aggressively.

‘Keep calm, Aunt Matilda. We’ve got the wrong man. This is Detective Inspector Lispington from Scotland Yard.’

‘And what is *he* doing here in the middle of the night?’ thundered Aunt Matilda. ‘I don’t want any double-dealers in my house.’

‘That’s enough, dear Aunt. He’s not a double-dealer. It’s all quite simple really,’ said Agaton Sax, all in Swedish. Changing over to English, he continued, ‘Forgive the porridge we have offered you, Inspector, but I was expecting my double. He’ll be here very soon. No doubt you would like to be present when I catch him?’

When Inspector Lispington had washed off all the porridge he followed Agaton Sax up to his editorial office. His anger had abated and, like the true gentleman he was, he explained frankly why he had arrived in such a furtive way. He had simply been anxious about Agaton’s safety and had wanted to be on hand if his double should try to attack him.

‘I understand,’ said Agaton Sax. ‘Now, however, we will capture the real double. Listen carefully. First, I will put out this lamp.’ He did so and the room lay in darkness; at the same time Agaton Sax lowered his voice to an almost soundless whisper.

‘I ask you now to go down to my Aunt Matilda. I’ll stay here. You and I will then sit and talk pleasantly and naturally together.’

‘Talk pleasantly and naturally?’ exclaimed Lispington in a whisper. ‘But you will be up here and I down there!’

‘That’s right. But we shall be talking to each other through the wall. There are microphones both up here and down there. From up here it will sound as if we were both sitting downstairs and having a pleasant little chat.’

Agaton Sax gave Lispington detailed instructions on what they were to talk about together. Lispington nodded. Then he crept down to the room below, while Agaton Sax stood at the window, hidden from view

by the curtain. He could, however, see the whole room through a little hole in the curtain fabric. His plan was as simple as it was clever. He was, as we have already seen, a very clever ventriloquist and he could therefore easily make his voice sound as if it came from the wall microphone. Anyone who crept into the office would find it apparently empty; but at the same time this unbidden guest, if he knew the secret of the speaking wall, would take it for granted that both the voices he heard came from downstairs in the sitting-room. In this way he would be lulled into a false security and take his time in trying to find what he was looking for.

Suddenly a slight noise was heard in the stillness outside. Everything was going just as Agaton Sax had foreseen. A man came creeping carefully up the fire-escape steps.

'Naturally,' said Agaton Sax in his most pleasant voice. (This word was the agreed signal to Lispington that the conversation should begin.)

'Really?' answered Inspector Lispington just as pleasantly. 'That would be hard to believe.'

'The man outside on the steps had stopped. He listened.

'You really mean that Stud Slogan has gone back to England?' asked Lispington.

'Just so,' answered Agaton Sax. 'He went off the day before yesterday. It was very annoying that we did not catch him.'

'Well, well, we nabbed the whole of the rest of the gang,' said Lispington, 'and I have the diamond!'

Agaton Sax laughed. The man outside was now sitting on the sill of the open window, listening to the conversation. When he saw that the room seemed empty, he decided that both the voices came from the speaking wall; so he swung his legs over the sill and crept silently towards the writing table. With a little shaded torch he examined the table, opened the middle drawer, and subjected it to a minute scrutiny.

Meanwhile, the pleasant conversation between Agaton Sax and Lispington continued. The man in the office stopped now and then to listen, obviously with a luxurious sense of his own safety.

Then Agaton Sax gathered himself up for the final coup. As part of the pleasant conversation he was saying jokingly to Inspector Lispington that the latter's liking for porridge had very much surprised him. Even as he said this, he pulled the curtains aside, quick as lightning, lifted his large revolver and pocket torch, and shouted, 'Up with your hands, Stud Slogan; the game is up!'



Stud Slogan—for it was he—turned round, terrified and blinded by the strong beam of the torch. ‘Agaton Sax!’

‘Himself! And you—his double! The first time you entered this room, you had a beard. The second time I saw you in 227 Sloane Street in London, you were disguised as Agaton Sax. Now you are clean shaven. Is this your real appearance, or have you several others?’

‘Many others,’ answered Stud Slogan with a pale smile. ‘But tell me one thing in confidence, Mr Sax. Who drew the picture and composed the code message in today’s paper? It was not I, as you know.’

‘I know indeed, Mr Slogan. It was my own aunt, Miss Matilda Sax.’

‘Oh, really!’ exclaimed Stud Slogan. ‘I’ve never liked her. She drugged my coffee, you know. When I came to in your cellar, I was still so confused by the effects that I wandered out into the town, still in my Sax disguise. When I finally recovered from this drugged state, I read that message in the newspaper and realised that Jim and Slim probably meant to give Octopus Scott a false diamond. Then I realised that you, Mr Sax, had no doubt understood the same thing, and that you had caught Jim and Slim and taken the real diamond.’

‘But tell me, Mr Slogan, where did you get the idea for these messages in code? Was it from the English edition of *Who’s Who in the World of Crime* for 1891?’ Slogan nodded.

‘And you offered the idea to one of the world’s most dangerous gangs, didn’t you? Good. I realised at a very early stage that you could not be a hundred and thirteen years old.’

‘Tell me, Mr Sax,’ continued Stud Slogan in a melancholy voice, ‘how did you know that I was likely to come back here tonight?’

‘Well, Mr Slogan, I realised that you were extremely intelligent, and that therefore you were quite certain to guess that it was I who would have succeeded in getting hold of the Koh-Mih-Nor diamond. So what would be more natural than that you should come here and try to steal the diamond back from me?’

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed Inspector Lispington, who at this moment entered the room. ‘Did he really think that the diamond was here? No, I have it!’

And Inspector Lispington proudly pulled a stone out of his waistcoat pocket. It shone and glistened in the light of the torch.

'One moment!' said Agaton Sax and lifted his right hand. 'Would you, Inspector Lispington, be kind enough to arrange for Stud Slogan to be removed?'

'Immediately. Here are my men now,' said Inspector Lispington.

'The two policemen who had followed the Inspector each took a good grip of Stud Slogan, who bowed politely to his captors and was led off to Bykoping gaol. We will draw a merciful veil over the bitter and furious words there hurled at him by Octopus Scott, Sandy, Slim, and all the other members of the gang.'

'Well, that's the end of the matter,' said Lispington and rubbed his hands contentedly. 'Everybody is captured; the diamond is in safe keeping; and I would thank you for your kind co-operation, Mr Sax. Really quite a great deal of honour is due to you, and I think you'll find you receive £10,000 reward from the authorities and the insurance people for your assistance in finding the Koh-Mih-Nor diamond.'

'One moment, Inspector Lispington,' said Agaton Sax. 'May I have a look at the diamond you hold?'

'Of course, here you are!'



Lispington handed the stone to Agaton Sax. The editor turned it once or twice between his thumb and first finger; then he went over to the window and threw it out into the dark.

'Mr Sax! What have you done? Are you mad? I protest!'

'Calm yourself, Inspector, all will be well.'

'All will be well, indeed! What do you mean?'

'That diamond is false.'

'False?'

'False. It is, I should imagine, worth about five and sixpence.'

'But that's incredible! How can you say it?' Inspector Lispington, entirely bewildered, wondered whether Agaton Sax had not suddenly taken leave of his senses.

'Now listen carefully,' said Agaton Sax in a firm voice. 'The diamond I have just thrown out of the window was handed over to Octopus P Scott in the park by Jim and Slim. I saw it all myself through the office telescope. But I realised that of course Jim and Slim were handing over a false diamond. Why should they have given up the real one? Octopus Scott, however, immediately fell into the trap; and you caught Octopus

Scott and his accomplices. You took the diamond, which you, as they, thought to be genuine. Meanwhile Jim and Slim were hurrying to leave the town; but I caught them and removed their loot. Here is the real diamond—the one that Jim and Slim stole in Stockholm, and which they intended to keep for themselves. Here you are!

And Agaton Sax with a triumphant little gesture brought out the real Koh-Mih-Nor diamond from his waistcoat pocket.

Inspector Lispington sat like one who has been struck by lightning.

‘A cup of coffee?’ said Agaton Sax in a friendly tone, just as Aunt Matilda entered with the coffee-tray. ‘I should have liked to offer you roasted chestnuts, but unfortunately we have none in the house. It is my favourite food. I always eat them in my hotel room when I am in London.’

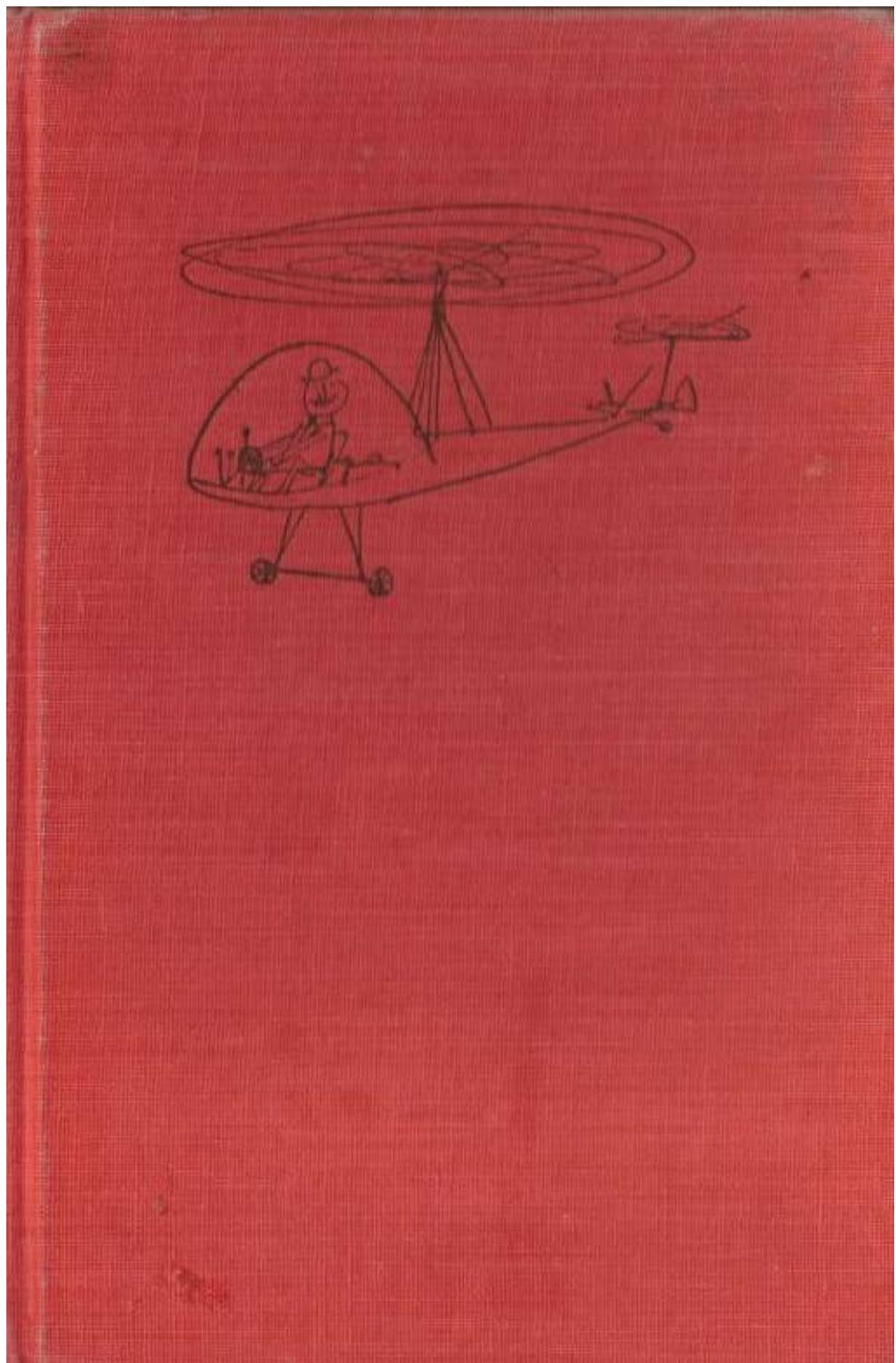
With this we leave the two gentlemen. It need only be added that Inspector Lispington, even today, broods over the strange fact that both Agaton Sax and his double eat roasted chestnuts in their hotel rooms in London!

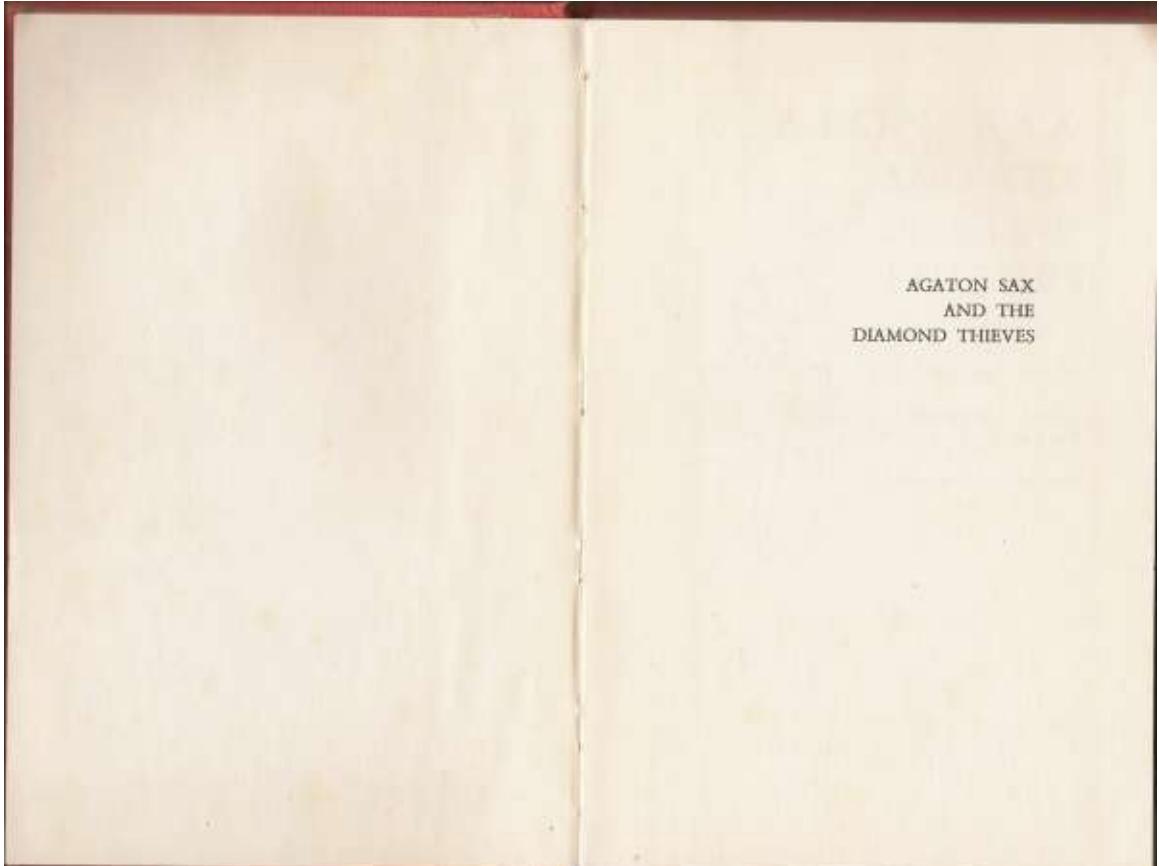


About the Author

Nils-Olof Franzen has written seven books about master detective Agaton Sax which have enjoyed a phenomenal success in Sweden, Germany, Holland and England. He is also the author of three historical novels for adults, four historical novels for children, biographies of Moliere, Zola and Rossini, and has translated into Swedish Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Mr Franzen was born in Oxelosund, Sweden, in 1916 and he now lives in Stockholm with his wife and three children. He has been in radio broadcasting since 1940, starting as an announcer, and is at present the Program Director for Sound Radio in Sweden.





AGATON SAX
AND THE
DIAMOND THIEVES

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by Nils-Olof Franzen

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